• 10 Ways To Improve Your VCR's Performance •

VIDEO magazine

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GIANT Strides For Big Screens

- *How They've Improved*
- *We Pick The Best Of Seven 50 to 55-Inch TVs*

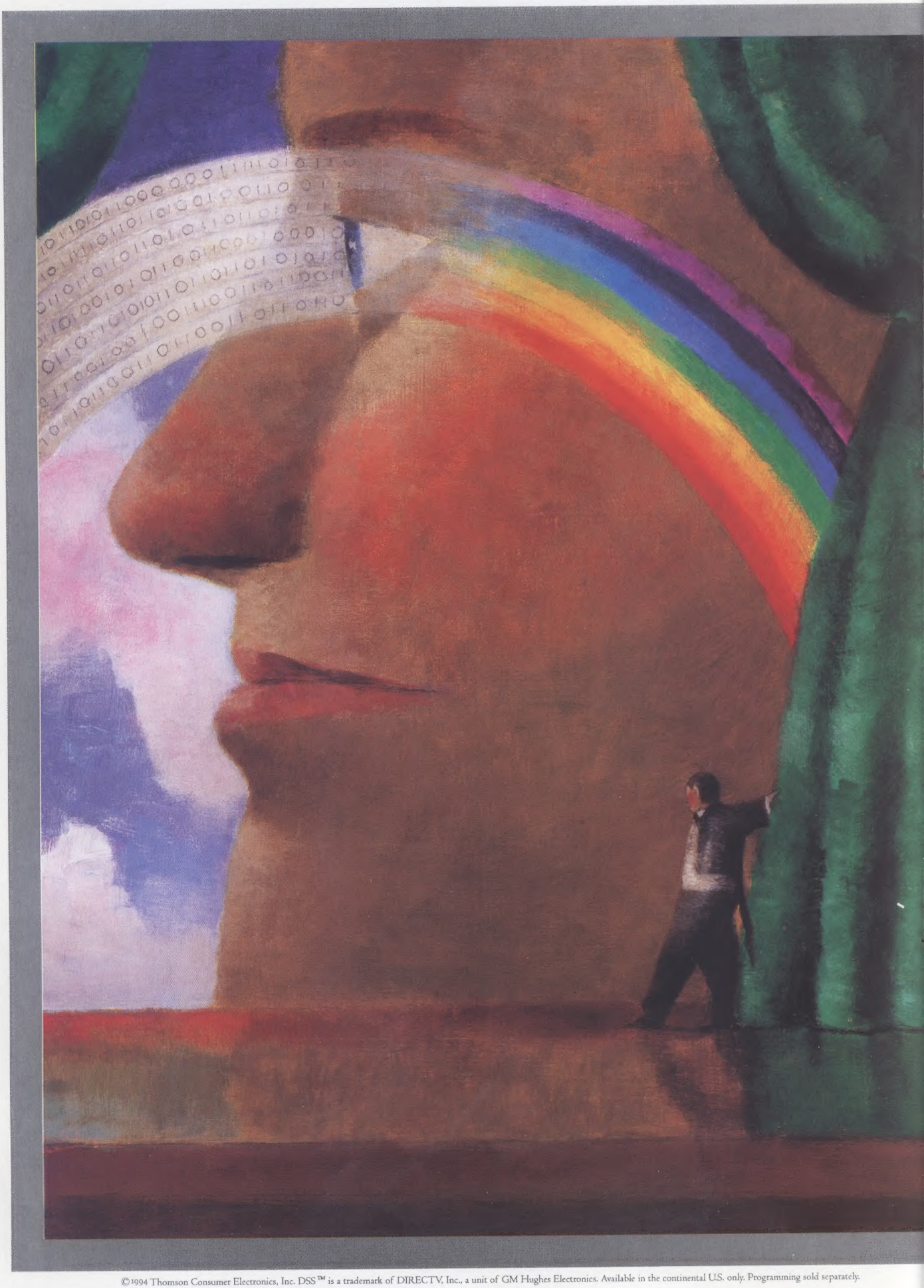
FRONT & CENTER SPEAKERS

6 Home Theater Trios Ready For Movies And Music

NEW PRODUCTS FROM COMDEX

5 VIDEOTESTS

32-Inch TV, LCD TV, 8mm Camcorder, VHS VCR, Surround Sound Receiver



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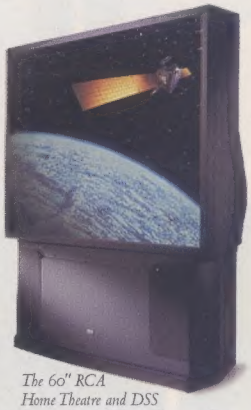

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VIDEO *magazine*

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Three big-screen contenders (from left): Zenith's 52-inch PV5269, Mitsubishi's 50-inch VS5055 and Toshiba's 55-inch TP55D80. Photograph by Les Morsillo

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CHANNEL ONE

Big picture, big sound

This month's features focus on two essential elements of the home theater experience–big pictures and big sound. The picture part of the equation is "Giant Strides for Big Screens," a pre-Superbowl playoff among seven rear-projection TVs by leading manufacturers. If you haven't checked out this species of component in a while, now's the time because the sets, their relative merits apart, were dazzling as a group, delivering big, impressive pictures and sophisticated features.

The audio part of the equation, "Speakers of the House," looks at half a dozen very serious front speakers. A few years ago, the companies that designed them were focused on music. Attuned now as well to the special needs of movie soundtracks, they've added complementary center channel speakers without sacrificing the strengths that made their speakers work well with musical performances. What we heard shows you don't have to sacrifice great sounding music for dramatic sounding movies.

•

Speaking of TVs, consumers bought 27 million in 1994. That's quite an achievement for a so-called mature product. After all, since everybody already has at least one, purchases must be more out of desire than need. On the other hand, if you're like us, you probably need a big set in the media room, a smaller one in the bedroom, an old hand-me-down for the kids, and a nine-inch portable in the kitchen. This would make it easy to handle the networks, cable, videotapes, videogames, laserdiscs, a camcorder and maybe a satellite dish. Sure, this sounds like more than enough for most households, but someone's buying all those sets.

•

Kudos to the Washington, D.C. city council for passing a law making it illegal to peddle pirated videotapes. Measures like this, already on the books in most states, protect people from miserable-looking tapes with barely legible sound. To snare hits like *Star Trek: Generations* and *The Santa Clause*, pirates often simply huddle in movie theaters with camcorders. But the same technology that can make your kid look like a movie star can make Captain Picard look like a Klingon. In D.C., police sweeps of street vendors, including some near the White House, quickly followed the new law, netting thousands of hot tapes of hit films. We say, good riddance to them all.

Stan Pinkwas

Stan Pinkwas
Editor

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Letters from our readers

Seeing is believing

Thanks for the fine article "A Few Good Decks" (Nov. '94). I recently taped a few programs from cable in standard VHS (SP mode) because I had run out of S-VHS tape. When I went back to look at the results, I was shocked to see the difference in quality and to realize that this is what 98 percent of the video-watching public is experiencing. With S-VHS you get a picture that doesn't make you feel like you need new eyeglasses. Wake up America and *see* the technology.

Bill Keene
Seattle, Washington

Case closed

I was very pleased with "The Case for Front Projectors" (Nov. '94). I have used an Advent 760 since 1980. With only an occasional tuneup and a good cable signal, I get a beautiful six-foot picture with no apparent lines and excellent convergence. Ambient light is reflected out of the way. It is not necessary, as your article indicated, to have a totally dark room. One only needs reduced lighting. I have yet to see a rear-projection television that matches the quality of front-projection.

Paul Kerlee
Elmsford, New York

The big picture

I need some clarification of your video product testing format. What is the correlation between a product's multiburst pattern and the zero-to-five picture quality rating? Some products get low ratings despite excellent performance on multiburst.

Chris Noell
Cincinnati, Ohio

Editor's Reply: The multiburst indicates video frequency response, which is only one component of video performance. Other elements include luminance noise, chroma AM and PM noise, phase jitter, digital artifacts, differential phase and timebase error. All these components must be examined to judge the overall performance of a video product. We print a multiburst pattern because it's usually the most relevant lab result that can be visually displayed.

Tape vs. disc

I have both VHS and laserdisc special editions of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. In comparing them, I discovered that the letterboxed laserdisc did not contain any more information than the panned-and-scanned VHS version. The top and bottom of the VHS picture had more detail, and these parts of the picture are absent on the letterboxed laserdisc. On VHS, you can see the bottom of the phone in the scene where Arnie smashes the pay phone. On the laserdisc, you can't see the bottom until he smashes it. It seems pan-and-scan offers more picture while letterbox offers only black bars.

Arnold's All: *T2*, letterboxed or panned-and-scanned?

Joe Redifer
Lakewood, Colorado

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—VIDEO magazine, January 1995

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FAST FORWARD

Tech world, Disney style

Can't get to Las Vegas for the Consumer Electronics Show? Consider the new Innoventions pavilion at Disney World in Florida. It's a showcase for hands-on demos of high-tech products just out, or soon to be released. Displays run the gamut from jet engines to heated toilet seats, with plenty for videophiles, including virtual reality gear, a Sega racing game played on large projection TVs and a television studio set-up in which visitors can see themselves being interviewed by Jay Leno.

–Lancelot Braithwaite

Mousecapades: Disney's virtual reality den.

Top 10 potholes on the video super-highway

After years of hype and alliances, a few traffic stoppers are developing along the video super-highway. Here are 10 reasons not to hold your breath for a 500-channel future:

1. Bell Atlantic's $11 billion advanced video network, promised for up to 8.5 million homes by the year 2000, has been delayed by technical problems and cost overruns. "These products are a little more difficult to develop than people thought," said Bell Atlantic chief Lawrence T. Babbio.
2. U S West is running into technical snags for an interactive TV system for 9,000 homes in Omaha.
3. A 4,000-home trial in Orlando, Florida of Time-Warner's Full Service Network, has been scaled back. The system started with five paying customers.
4. Viacom is still waiting for set-top converters from AT&T for an interactive system that was to have begun last summer in Castro Valley, California.
5. General Instrument's digital cable boxes, scheduled to roll out last summer, may not appear until early 1996. TCI, the nation's largest cable operator, is waiting for a million of them.
6. Northwest Airlines is stripping its planes of an interactive video system that let passengers watch TV, shop or play videogames at their seats. Too many technical problems.
7. Top Microsoft scientist Nathan Myhrvold compared belief in the information superhighway to belief in Santa Claus. "It's unbelievable for something that doesn't exist," he said at a recent conference for high-tech execs.
8. Corporate feuding, chiefly among regional phone companies, did in a Congressional effort to rewrite the nation's telecommunications laws for the first time in 60 years.
9. Video-on-demand, the leading candidate for a "killer application" among new technology services, rated only tenth among 26 possible uses of a national information network.
10. Despite years of work, prospects for HDTV remain iffy. While a standard will soon emerge, broadcasters are lukewarm about it's potential.

–Frank Beacham

Kevin Costner's hour of the Wolves

When is a director's cut not a director's cut? When the film is *Dances With Wolves*. The new limited edition laserdisc released recently by Orion has about an extra hour of material added to the oscar-winning film. But even though actor/director Kevin Costner added the material, he doesn't approve of it. "I wish they hadn't released it," said Costner during a recent promotion tour for his latest film, *The War*. "But it was a contractual thing with Orion."

The special edition, which is not labeled a director's cut, includes scenes Costner says he created exclusively for the movie's European version. Costner, who has had a series of tiffs with Orion over financial matters, says, "It's an hour I was obligated to put into the movie for Europe where I raised most of the money. But it wasn't the way I wanted the film seen in America." Our own reviewer thought the limited edition was "vastly superior" ("Tapes and Discs," Jan.).

Costner could have made a longer version he liked, but he says Orion didn't offer the option. "If people had asked me to put in an extra hour I would have really massaged it and done everything I could," he said. "But they just took this European version and put it out on laserdisc."

–Jon Silberg

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Everyone is thinking about it. Everyone thinks everyone else is doing it. Everyone talks about it, but only a few are actually doing it. The few who are doing it are not doing it well. And everyone hopes it will be great when they finally do it."

– THOMAS ROGERS,
President, NBC Cable & Business Development, explaining why interactive TV is like teenage sex.

Media Pool, a tapeless video server, makes its mark

Media Pool is a new tapeless video recording technology that stores images and sound in a huge bowl of digital soup, and it's about to change the way the broadcasters think about video recorders. The brainchild of BTS, a Philips-owned broadcast equipment maker, Media Pool is so radical its designers had to equip it with more traditional functions to make it a viable product. What exactly is it? According to BTS product manager Mark Ostlund, Media Pool "is a real-time, full bandwidth video server that has more horsepower than a supercomputer." It's especially useful for delivering interactive video streams, and giving lots of people simultaneous access to a large body of video and multichannel audio. While strictly for the pros, it's an important signpost on the road toward tapeless taping.

Pool Power: 100 hours of digital video.

Media Pool systems can hold more than 100 hours of material. They're compatible with a variety of video compression schemes, which can be customized for each program in the pool. "We have a demo of a single recording on which one channel is slo-moing forward, another channel is slo-moing backwards, another is running at play speed and another is doing an insertion edit," said Ostlund.

To make the Pool practical, optional software packages allow it to emulate a digital videotape recorder with editing capability, a multichannel digital cartridge machine and a time shift-delay system for use in crossing time zones.

Media Pool, predicts Ostlund, will play a big role in interactive home video. "We can do 4,000 MPEG streams with full interactive control and have only one copy of a given video in the Media Pool," he explained.

At a recent European video show, for example, one Media Pool fed 100 CD-i bays, with gamers furiously toggling away. There were no discs in any of the CD-i players, and only one copy of the game in the Pool. "This is the only [computer] architecture in the world that lets you have that many individual users with only one copy of the program," said Ostlund.

Media Pool can work with cable TV, telephone lines and closed-circuit systems in hotels, cruise ships and airplanes. The Pool is just hitting the market at prices starting at $40,000. You won't be able to buy it, but you'll soon see its handiwork. Among the first applications: it will let TV news programs continue to edit late-breaking stories while the video is actually being broadcast. **–FB**

THE NUMBER

144 million

Blank videotapes owned by U.S. households

TIMESHIFT
TEN YEARS AGO IN VIDEO MAGAZINE

"Disposable VCRs—so cheap that when they break you'll toss them out and buy another—are due in the U.S. for the first time next month...*Raiders of the Lost Ark* has broken the sales barrier by becoming the first home video release to sell more than a million copies. That's more than *Thriller* (800,000) or *Jane Fonda's Workout* (760,000)...The attack of the giant TV tubes has begun. Big-tube direct-view TVs offer pictures potentially superior to projection models, and a race is on to capture the big-tube market. So far Mitsubishi is the front runner, at least in screen size. The company has just announced that it has a 35-inch tube TV...Cable is still stereo-unready, but there is a great deal of pressure to make cable companies carry multichannel TV sound. Networks, for example, are gleefully insisting that the FCC enforce "must carry" laws, which state that cable has to deliver the entirety of any broadcast signal—including stereo sound if it's there...LCD color sets from Seiko, Casio, and Citizen are getting better both in picture quality and price. A 12-inch, flat-screen, wall-hanging color set is due from Casio soon...Your big break in showbiz could be just $3,700 away. That's how much it costs to buy a half-hour TV appearance on KFCB's *A Closer Look* daytime talk show. The time is yours to kill, but the California UHF station is of fundamentalist Christian persuasion, so you'll have to mind your manners...With millions and millions of VCRs already sold and thousands more selling every day, who is going to fix them when they break? And when their video heads wear out or motors die, will it still be economical to fix them? Tough questions...Will 1985 be the year the 8mm video format brings us together? We hope more video companies strike out on their own with 8mm VCRs for off-air recording and playback. ■

FEBRUARY 1985

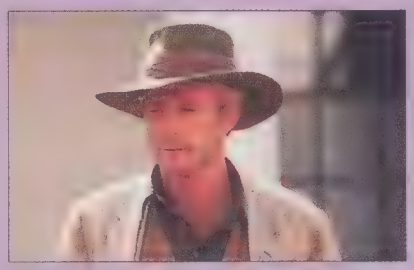
Late Breaking News

SONY HAS developed a new process to create digital masters for laserdiscs and prerecorded videotapes that it says will significantly improve the quality of duplicated tapes on the VCRs and laserdisc players that consumers already own. According to Columbia TriStar Home Video, which will be using the new digital masters, the process will produce clearer, more detailed video pictures with less vertical jitter and more accurate colors. The process will initially be used on future releases by Sony Pictures. The best part of the deal for consumers is that the improvements won't cost them anything.

•

A COUPLE DOZEN HOMES IN and around Baltimore are being wired to allow their television sets to serve as residential, interactive wagering devices. Viewers with approved betting accounts will be able to use their televisions to place bets on races at Maryland's Laurel Race Track through a series of onscreen displays. When a bet is placed, the transaction is sent to the track's tote computer, which issues an approval and enters the information into the appropriate race pool. If the test, which requires permission from the Maryland Racing Commission, succeeds, the service will be offered more widely and expanded to include racing programs from several tracks. The project has been developed by the Maryland Jockey Club and ODS Technologies of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

•



Redford: Environmental interactivism.

ROBERT REDFORD, FRESH FROM his success with *Quiz Show*, is producing an interactive game called *Legacy* for Pioneer's LaserActive system, which uses full-sized laserdiscs. The disc, developed with Illumina Productions, puts players in the shoes of an investigative reporter attempting to save a wilderness area from rapacious corporate interests. Look for a March release for $79.

•

FORREST GUMP, THE MONSTER hit with the soft chocolate center, is coming to video at the end of April for $22.95. Propelled by what could be Paramount Home Video's biggest marketing campaigns, Gump will definitely happen.

•

COMPAQ TELEVISIONS? NOT YET, but soon. Compaq, one of the world's leading makers of personal computers, is planning to plunge into the consumer electronics market with TV sets that share some of the characteristics of computers. One development prototype, dubbed Mr. PC Head, combines a television, a telephone, a stereo and computing capabilities.

•

ADD TRICENTRIC, AS IN IT'S A "Tricentric world," to your video lexicon. That's what life will be like, according to Hal Krisburgh, former president of Jerrold Communications, when all homes are humming with TVs, videophones and PCs. ■

ONE ON ONE

with Steve Case

America Online (AOL) is the nation's fastest-growing provider of online computer services. Based in Vienna, Virginia, AOL offers more than 1 million subscribers a variety of services, including electronic mail, conferencing, software, computing support, interactive magazines and newspapers, and access to the Internet. AOL was founded in 1985 by Steve Case. As its chief, Case, 35, has seen the network triple in size over the past year. *Video Magazine* contributing editor Frank Beacham spoke recently with Case about the role video technology will play in AOL's future.

Video: How soon can we expect full-motion video to arrive on an online service?

Case: That's hard to predict. It's really a function of how quickly cable-companies build broadband networks so that PCs can be plugged into their infrastructure. There's a lot of testing going on now. My sense is it will be three to five years before video is broadly available nationally.

Video: Will we see video come to online services first through cable systems?

Case: It's a hard call at this point. I think there will be multiple high-speed networks capable of live-action video. The distinction between cable and phone will probably blur as the telephone companies build high-speed networks and the cable companies build telephony capability. There will eventually be multiple providers of networks.

Video: What form will video take on a service such as AOL? Will we see video offered for downloading by subscribers, or will subscribers be able to trade video clips with each other in a form of video e-mail?

Case: Both. There will certainly be trading [between subscribers] of software applications with live-action video, photos and so forth. There will also be video that we and our software partners provide for people to use.

Video: For camcorder users to send video e-mail, they'll need to tie a camcorder to their personal computer. How will that work?

Case: I don't think it will be all that difficult for people to capture andtransmit video over computers. There are a number of companies working on these things. I think the issue is more about how quickly the networks will be built that can support it. We do video now. You can download trailers of movies, but at relatively slow modem speeds. You have to be awfully patient and it's limited. But as the networks get better, I think all the other pieces will fall into place.

Video: Will video capability help a service such as AOL differentiate itself from the Internet?

Steve Case

Case: The Internet will have video support as well. I don't think the technologies will be that different in the long term. We will offer a broader set of features that are better packaged and organized. We think people will go where there is a wider range of services bundled together in a fun, engaging way at an affordable price. It will come down to brands that people trust. ■

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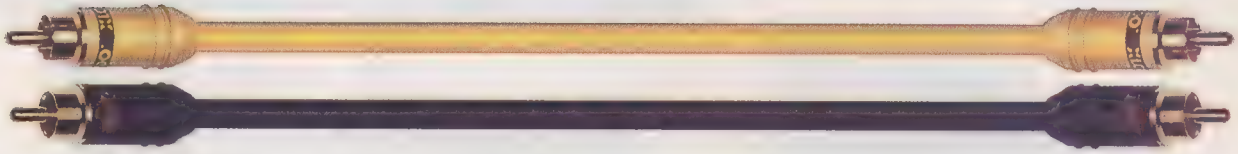

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BY STEWART APPLEGATH

A digital receiver, Hi8 tape, home theater speakers, more

SOUND PIONEER▸

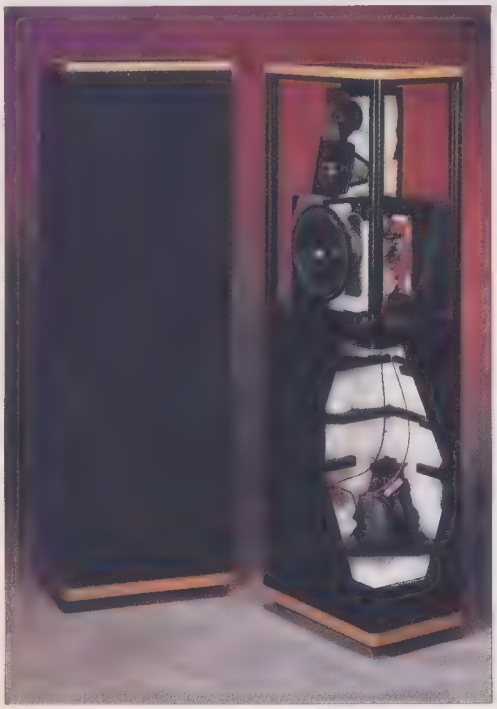
Pioneer's VSX-53 Audio/Video receiver is designed to meet the needs of home theater enthusiasts for ever better components. Part of Pioneer's Elite line, the VSX-53 includes a Dolby Pro-Logic surround-sound system that uses an advanced digital signal processor to simulate natural sound ambience. It features a continuous average power output of 130 watts per channel, at 8 ohms with no more than .05 percent total harmonic distortion. The price is $900. (For more info, circle 103 on the Reader Service Card)

MOBILE POWER▸

Statpower Technologies' PROwatt 150 DC to AC inverter ($100) is a universal automobile adapter for camcorders and small TVs as well as notebook computers and cellular phones. Converting the 12V DC power available in a car's lighter socket to 115V AC, the PROwatt produces 150 watts of power. (For more info, contact Noreen Bentz, Statpower Technologies, 7725 Lougheed Hwy., Burnaby, B.C. Canada V5A 4V8)

◂TAPED CRUSADER

Sony's HMPX Hi8 tape is something serious Hi8 shooters should have in their arsenal for recording events that matter. This is a professional-quality tape that provides greater durability for shooting and editing, reduced dropouts and high picture performance through improved dispersion technology. Sony says a new lubricant increases durability, while a new backcoating and manufacturing process assure consistently low dropouts. HMPX comes in 30-, 60- and 120-minutes lengths at $5-$11. (For more info, circle 107 on the Reader Service Card)



◂MAGNETIC PERSONALITY

Driver, crossover and structural advances distinguish Vandersteen Audio's Model 3A speaker ($2,595/pair with standard rear brace) from its predecessor. An innovative magnet system is designed to improve bass linearity and control while minimizing distortion. In addition, Vandersteen says a newly developed cabinet provides a more inert sound platform, while modifications to the tweeter improve transparency and openness. (For more info, circle 104 on the Reader Service Card)

FOR THE RECORD▸

Gemini Industries' CAMQuip Video Transfer System ($99) allows you to transfer slides, photographic prints or movies onto videotape. Gemini says its fluorescent illumination results in brilliant color saturation, while precision optics ensure high-quality reproductions. The system is compatible with all camcorders, and will transfer any size print. (For more info, circle 101 on the Reader Service Card)

PANABLACK BEAUTY ▶
Panasonic's PV-M2044 TVCR ($599) is a 20-inch combo that incorporates a four-head VCR. The arrangement allows for a range of effects, such as double-fine slow-motion in SP and SLP, high-speed search in both modes, picture still and frame advance. It also features Panablack picture tube technology, which Panasonic says increases screen contrast by 40 percent. (For more info, circle 100 on the Reader Service Card)

◀WHEN IN DOUBT
BASF's VideOccasions ($8) is a video greeting card kit that comes with a 10-minute blank tape, labels, shooting ideas and a gift box for mailing. With complete kits for birthdays and Christmas, you can now send a video of yourself instead of another new tie. (800-853-3622)

▼SWEET AND EXTRA LOW
B.I.C.'s C-10 PWR powered subwoofer ($449) features both video shielding and a high-performance 10-inch long-throw woofer. Measuring 17 inches high, 13 inches wide and 16 inches deep, this black sub lets users add extra low bass articulation. It also features an adjustable crossover frequency (50-200 Hertz) and an auto on/off switch that turns the subwoofer on when a low frequency signal is present, and off when it's not required. (For more info, circle 105 on the Reader Service Card)

STEADY COMBI ▲
Panasonic's LXH170 multi laserdisc player ($450) gives you high-end value on the cheap. In addition to standard programming features, this combi player borrows other goods from more expensive Panasonic models. With a digital timebase corrector, a digital servo system, and a shuttle knob, Panasonic says you will your experience discs with rock-solid clarity and precision. (For more info, circle 108 on the Reader Service Card)

NEW ENERGY ▲
Designed with both music and surround sound reproduction in mind, Energy's HTS-1 system ($750) consists of magnetically shielded, mid-level speakers that can handle power ratings between 25-125 watts RMS per channel. Also available from Energy are two powered subwoofers (a 90-watt model for $550 and a180-watt model for $750) with a switchable mode control for music or movies. The Encore loudspeakers (pictured) are rated at 30-100 watts. (For more info, circle 106 on the Reader Service Card)

◀TOWER OF POWER
Consolidated Technology's CT-Tower ($20) is a mobile caddy that can serve all your remote control needs. Just attach your remotes to the plastic carrier with the included Velcro strips. The tower can also be embellished with desktop items, such as calculators and notepads. It promises a low-tech solution to high-tech disorder. (For more info, circle 102 on the Reader Service Card)

Bloodier blood, scarier scr
other benefits of USSB

USSB digital entertainment is breakthrough, state-of-the-art transmission of television programs in the form of digital information. The result is a sparkling, super clear picture comparable to laserdisc quality. Plus sound that's unsurpassed even by digital CDs. The effect is startling. Action scenes become more exciting, love scenes more romantic, and the landscapes will take your breath away. It is quite simply the sharpest, most brilliant picture and clearest sound ever broadcast.

IT COMES TO YOU FROM OUTER SPACE. What makes it possible is the remarkable new technology from RCA called the Digital Satellite System. Because it uses the largest, most powerful communications satellite ever launched, it broadcasts up to 150 channels of perfect digital signals that can be picked up by a tiny 18" satellite dish.

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eams, sweatier palms and digital entertainment.

exclusive original programming including comedy, movies, documentaries, family series and sports specials. Plus classic and contemporary films on Cinemax. Movies from the 60's, 70's and 80's on FLIX, and non-stop movies on The Movie Channel. You'll also get great music videos on MTV and VH-1, unique comedy on Comedy Central, great children's programs on Nickelodeon, and classic television on Nick at Nite. As well as quality women's programs on Lifetime and the 24-hour-a-day fast-paced All News Channel. Plus our pledge to provide you with the very highest level of customer service and support...24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

A SAMPLE OF THE TREMENDOUS CHOICE OF MOVIES YOU GET EVERY TIME YOU WATCH USSB.

MULTICHANNEL MAGIC. With USSB, you get five distinct channels of HBO, three channels of Showtime, two versions of The Movie Channel, three channels of Cinemax, as well as FLIX. Fourteen distinct premium channel choices every time you sit down to watch TV. It's a movie-lover's paradise.

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Circle 2 on Reader Service Card.

A powerhouse remote and a clever shooting aid

Lexicon 500T System Controller

My universal remote control has an inferiority complex, and it's all Lexicon's fault. You see, Lexicon sent me this 500T System Controller that makes ordinary remotes pale by comparison. The 500T is a touch-screen computer that lets you design your own screens, called pages, by placing onscreen buttons wherever you see fit. The buttons let the controller operate virtually anything that uses infrared commands, and since the 500 in 500T stands for the number of IR commands it can store, you're likely to run out of gear before memory.

Command Central: The 500T, powerful enough to run a home theater.

$2,000 • RATING ★★★★☆

The 500T accommodates up to 23 pages, but you can combine buttons from many components on one page. For example, surround processor volume, basic laserdisc player controls, and TV brightness controls can all be on one screen. You can even control IR-based curtains or room lights, if your home theater is so equipped. You "draw" buttons by poking at a grid on a setup page. Many sizes and up to 10 shapes are available, including arrows, boxes and ovals. They can be bordered or unbordered, flat or shadowed. Text can be white on blue, or blue on white. Once a page is designed, the buttons learn commands from IR remotes in the standard fashion. The 500T even has a learning window in front so both units can be right-side up.

Programming can be intimidating at first, but Macintosh and Windows users will find their way around the setup routines faster than you can say graphic interface. To simplify programming, a "copy page" feature lets you create a template for buttons, like volume and mute, that you would want on every screen. An RJ-11 jack allows the swapping of screens via a PC-compatible computer.

You can even create macros that fire off as many as 24 commands at the press of a single button. One "Home Theater" button could power up the system, the TV, and a laserdisc player, then select the LD input and Dolby Pro-Logic. If an IR signal is blocked somehow, it will screw up the macro's progression, but the 500T is much more powerful than most IR remotes. Macros aren't as useful if one or more components have little or no IR capability, but I got around this problem by designing an "Easy Command" routine that walks a user through the turn-on procedure with text instructions and options on sequential pages.

The 500T is big for a remote, and it offers no tactile buttons. It has a backlight for the screen that's surprisingly bright, and that can be set to shut off when the remote is not being used. This helps conserve the rechargeable battery, which lasts about a week with average use. (It comes with a recharger stand.) The 500T is remarkably well designed. I'm hard to impress, and this is the coolest gadget I've laid my hands on in a long time.

Sadly, it's available through dealers only as part of system automation packages (along with IR repeaters, customized documentation, and the like). The price starts at about $2,000, but this includes your installer's system-setting services. Perhaps if videophiles beg loudly enough, Lexicon will make it available at retail.

–Joe Weisenfelder

Glidecam 1000 PRO Camcorder Stabilizer

My camcorder smoothly and quickly glided down the stairs, then took a whip-fast swing around the corner. Suddenly, my image turned upside down for a view across the room, then instantly righted itself before beginning a mad dash outside and across the yard. Watching what I'd shot, I felt like I'd mounted my camcorder on the head of a fly. In fact, the shots were made possible by the Glidecam 1000 PRO, a new camcorder stabilizer.

Like the older Steadycam JR, the Glidecam achieves stability by using a gimbaled handle to isolate a counterbalanced camcorder from the operator. It works well with camcorders weighing up to 5.5 pounds, and is easy to assemble, balance and use. The camcorder is secured to a plate that rests atop a 16-inch aluminum rod. Depending on your camcorder, you'll add up to two pounds of washers to the bottom of the rod for balance. With a camcorder, the Glidecam's total weight ranges from

Stand and Deliver: The Glidecam ends jitters.

$250 • RATING ★★★★☆

about six to 10 pounds.

The Glidecam's slim design also allows it to be operated close to the body. Basic operation is self-evident. Just try it out. It's capable of such a wide array of movements that there is a way to accomplish almost any angle you can imagine, although the rod prevents very low shots. However, you can use the rod to swing the camcorder into position for ingenious types of shots. For example, while running across a roof, I stopped dead at the roof's edge and dropped my upper steering hand to the rod's base, swiftly arcing the camcorder into facing straight-down over the edge to the ground. The footage feels like the camcorder jumped!

The Glidecam's handle is off-center, permitting several inches of vertical movement by a user. This absorbs bounces, as when you're running, without affecting camcorder balance. However, the off-set handle also increases wrist stress which, combined with the overall weight, can make it strenuous to hold for long shots.

The Glidecam does not include a monitor, partly to hold down pricing. But you won't miss it. The Glidecam, says the company, is often best operated in a point-and-shoot mode. If monitoring is desirable, you can attach a small field monitor to a fitting on the Glidecam's base, or take off your viewfinder's eyepiece so you can at least check the camcorder's orientation.

The design makes the Glidecam awkward to pack without disassembly. However, it's so durable day to day punishment is not a worry. The bottom line is it can expand the versatility of your shots and give your action footage a more professional look. ■

TECH TIPS

Space age titles

The superimpose feature that's found on Panasonic consumer video mixers–like the WJ-AVE3, the WJ-AVE5 and the WJ-AVE7–can be used to design impressive looking titles. For example, print a title on a piece of paper, tape it to a lampshade, then shoot it with your camcorder (sitting level). You will get a curved title that seems to grow larger as it nears the bottom of the screen, once it's put through superimpose and reversed over another shot. In the same way, point your camcorder down at an angle over several title pages taped together. Record as you pull the pages away from the lens. The titles will "crawl" and seem to recede into the distance, just like the titles in the *Star Wars* movies.

Quick study

If your computer has a video capture card like Creative Lab's VideoSpigot or Intel's Smart Video Recorder and you have a camcorder, you can use the camcorder as an image scanner. Point the camcorder at the picture you'd like to scan and frame it as you'd like to see it. Plug the camcorder's video output into the capture card's video input. Run the capture software at the highest possible image setting and save the image as a single frame. Also, if your camcorder has some form of slide or negative adapter, you can use your camcorder and capture card as a slide scanner.

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SPECIAL REPORT

BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

New from COMDEX– movie machines, F/X ware & TIMM

The fall COMDEX computer show in Las Vegas may be the best place on earth to glimpse the future of video but, ironically, video enthusiasts would have seen little at COMDEX they might want to use. That's because digital video, the kind you get from computers and CD-ROMs, is still in its infancy and, in most cases, still inferior to what you can produce with two VHS VCRs. Most desktop video products at COMDEX relied on small, partial-screen video windows and frame rates of 15 per second or less, which give videos a strobe effect.

But most is not all. Fast Electronics showed an impressive digital video editing system. The company offers a hardware/software package for full digital editing on its Video Machine, a 1993 *Video Magazine* Best of the Year award-winner. With the new Fast Digital Player Recorder (DP/R), you can cut and paste video clips, add scene transitions and special effects, dub in new audio, and instantly observe the result. And you can record and mix up to eight channels of CD-quality audio.

Unlike many digital editing systems, which require you to select an effect like a dissolve, then wait for the system to render it, DP/R produces effects instantly. You can set the compression to as little as 2:1 for broadcast-quality editing, although setting the ratio higher lets you store more video. Fast demonstrated the DP/R at the more useful 6:1 ratio. I could tell the digitized video from the original Betacam SP tape, but barely. At about $15,000 for a complete system, including the Video Machine, the system won't find many home users, though.

But Fast also introduced the Movie Machine, a video editing board that performs many of the same functions as the Videonics' MX-1 mixer, at the amazingly low price of $599. The Movie Machine mixes between any two video sources without timebase correctors, as the Video Toaster requires. It performs luma keying for titling and chroma keying (the blue-screen "weatherman" effect). It creates strobe and other special effects, mixes audio, and can even perform nonlinear editing with a $400 card that captures and compresses video using Motion JPEG, a motion version of the still-frame compression scheme developed by the Joint Photographic Experts Group.

With the death of Commodore and its Amiga computer, the folks at NewTek are seeking new platforms for the applications they developed for the Video Toaster, the Amiga-based board that introduced desktop video to professional video producers. The first application to be ported to PC is *LightWave*, the 3-D modeling and animation package used to create the striking special effects in *SeaQuest DSV* and *Babylon 5*. Unfortunately, the PC version of *LightWave* runs only on Windows NT, an esoteric, high-end operating system. And NewTek didn't adapt the graphical user interface (GUI) to Windows. It looks like the old Amiga GUI.

Next Generation: Fast's $599 Movie Machine for digital video mixing and Toshiba's TIMM monitor.

LightWave may convert some PC enthusiasts into 3-D freaks, but it'll get a lot of competition from version 2.0 of *Caligari TrueSpace*. When the Toaster came out, I struggled with *LightWave* for weeks before I felt any mastery of it, largely because it uses separate modules for modeling and animation, making it tough to visualize what your objects will look like. *TrueSpace*, however, lets you model and animate 3-D wireframe objects on the same screen. Version 2.0 adds a preview screen that does crude renderings in real time so you can see instantly how your animation will look, without having to wait several minutes for the computer to render the frames.

Recently, several NewTek employees left to start Play, a company devoted to creating inexpensive, high-performance hardware and software for the PC. Its first product is the $199 Snappy, a cute-as-a-bug device that produces the best video stills I've ever seen. Just plug Snappy into your printer port, plug your camcorder into Snappy, and use Play's video capture utility to grab frames. You can find great examples of Snappy's quality in Play's brochure. The photos look like they were brought in with a high-resolution scanner, but were actually captured with Snappy and a consumer camcorder.

The Windows versions of Adobe's *Premiere*, the industry standard for computer video editing, have always lagged behind the Mac versions. But it looks like the PC may soon catch up. *Premiere for Windows 4.0* includes many new features previously limited to the Mac, including time code support and luma, chroma and alpha-channel keying. The quality's still only good enough for multimedia, though. *Premiere* will probably have to move up to hardware-based compression like MPEG before it achieves video quality that camcorder enthusiasts will accept.

Another fresh import from the Mac, *Elastic Reality*, produced some of the most radical morphing, warping and matting effects I've seen. Hollywood effects guys have already used *Elastic Reality* in special-effects extravaganzas like *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, *Forrest Gump* and *Speed*. What does it do? Almost anything you can imagine. Inflate a subject's head and float it away like a balloon? No problem.

One exhibit held the promise of broadcast-quality desktop video on the cheap. Vitec Multimedia showed a prototype of a real-time, $600 MPEG encoder that displayed good resolution and color depth. It would undercut the least-expensive encoder I've seen by about $1,500. Alas, it's still on the drawing

continued on page 39

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BY RICH WARREN

From basement to bijou, and how it happened

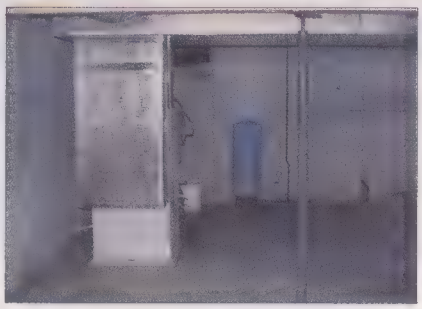
While home video cannot equal film in visual quality, a home theater can equal and often surpass the best commercial theaters in sound quality. I had long dreamt of a dedicated theater, consisting of more than just suitable components in an existing room. Fortunately, a big, empty concrete bunker of a basement waited below my house.

My basement measures approximately 50 feet by 26 feet, and is almost eight feet high. However, the sunken living room upstairs reduces the height to just over six feet for about 15 feet of the 50-foot length. Utilities chop another 10 feet from the length leaving about 25 usable feet. The load-supporting center beam and entry stairway reduce the usable width to about 13 feet. Not long ago I would have errantly built the best room I could within this area. Instead, I called THX, a subsidiary of Lucasfilm, at its Skywalker Ranch in Marin County, California, and was advised of semi-regular THX home theater training sessions for dealers and installers. I arranged for the consultant and contractor of my project to attend the THX training seminar.

Whether or not you subscribe to the specifics of THX, few, if any, experts dispute the acoustical fundamentals it demands. THX provided a computer program that calculated optimal dimensions from available space to reduce standing waves. It dictated a room approximately 23 feet by 12 feet, with a nearly seven-foot ceiling. We made lemonade from lemons by using the lowered ceiling from the sunken living room to help create a faux proscenium. Behind the proscenium wall we built a large equipment room, with two openings for equipment shelving. We prevented sonic interaction between the equipment room and theater by deadening the room as if it was the inside of a speaker enclosure.

Irregular shelving was designed for the wall at the rear of the theater for videotape, laserdisc, LP and CD storage. The angled, jutting shelves help break up the soundwaves, while increasing visual interest. Shelving height and depth vary by media, further increasing irregularity. A wide oak crown molding around the room improves decor while filling the acoustically unwanted wall/ceiling corner.

THX recommended raising the second row of seats to improve sightlines. We accomplished this by building a three-inch high, sand-filled platform big enough for one loveseat or two large chairs, with jacks in the front for AC and S-video for the possible future use of a front projector.



Moviemorphosis: The author's basement, once a typical concrete bunker (below), was transformed into an impressive THX-oriented media room.

While not essential, choosing equipment prior to construction results in a more integrated theater, electrically, acoustically and visually. For example, knowing the size and shape of the surround speakers determines placement, and thus where the wiring will go, and whether the speakers hang independently or need a shelf. I chose the B&W THX Home Cinema speaker system. We opted for the faux proscenium with its alcove to fit the Toshiba 56-inch TheaterWide 16:9 rear projection TV; the new room layout allowed for a greater viewing distance that could accomodate the 56-incher.

Construction began with the relocation of ventilation ducts and the main plumbing drain pipe. This cost $2,000 before ever driving a nail, but permitted a higher ceiling, as well as eliminating two noise sources. A loud rush of water distracts from the most engrossing movie. Firring strips anchored to the concrete foundation supported the drywall and insulation on the outside walls. The inside walls are approximately 9-1/2-inches thick, with independent 2 x 4 studs for each side.

The walls consist of pairs of double drywall of dissimilar thickness separated between pairs by fiberglass batting. Different thicknesses damp resonance, increase rigidity, and decrease noise transmission. Shock absorbing butyl rubber caulk isolates all wiring penetrating the walls. R-38 fiberglass insulates the ceiling joist cavities, with ceiling drywall suspended from resilient metal channels instead of being fastened directly to the joists for further isolation. Doors are solid core wood with full weather-stripping. The large diameter ventilation ducts with oversize register grills virtually eliminate audible air turbulence.

We carpeted the room and platform with thick pile plush carpet on a heavy pad. This dramatically improves the acoustics by eliminating floor bounce from the speakers and reflections between floor and ceiling. Audio, video, lighting, and utility electrical outlets each are wired on independent 20-amp circuits. This reduces the chance of interaction, as well as providing the necessary audio power for the seven-piece speaker system. The theater includes sensors for water intrusion, smoke and a fire alarm system.

For all the expensive carpeting, fancy shelving, and attractive molding, the Lutron Magic-I lighting system elicits the most response from viewers. Six

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MAY 1994

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How To Shoot Action & Adventure
Videotests:
Toshiba M-760 VHS VCR
Memorex Model 17 8mm TVCR
Panasonic WJ-AVE7 Digital Mixer
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Panasonic PV-S64 S-VHS-C Camcorder
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SEPTEMBER 1994

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20 Universal Remotes Compared
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Canon ES-1000 Hi8 Camcorder
Studio Magic Desktop Video Package
Panasonic PV-4464 VHS VCR

OCTOBER 1994

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CES Review—Whats Hot, What's Not
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BY TIMOTHY LIEBE

Double-system sound, a shooting secret you can share

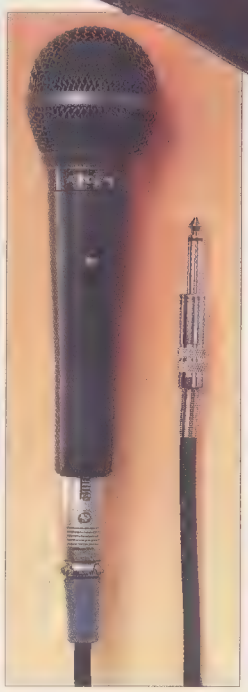
There are two types of synchronized sound you need to pay attention to as a videomaker. The first type, single-system sound, which camcorders use, records audio on the same piece of tape as the picture. The second type, double-system sound, uses a separate audio recorder that runs in sync with the camcorder. Because of its convenience and ease, single-system is the standard for consumer and low-end professional videomaking.

But it may not always be the best choice for your video projects. Audio quality with single-system sound is limited by such factors as the quality of your camcorder's sound recording capability, and whether it can accept an external microphone. You may also run into situations where the audio part of your shoot is as important, if not more so, than the video. In cases where you're conducting an interview or taping a live concert, double-system sound can prove invaluable, both for the boost in quality and as an aural backup.

Traditionally, double-system sound as used by filmmakers required special cameras and audiotape recorders that used either a sync pulse generated by the camera, which it transferred to an unused audio track on the recorder, or crystal oscillators built into the camera and the recorder that kept both the images and the sound moving at a constant speed. But these "pulse sync" and "crystal sync" systems cost far more than consumers could afford.

Fortunately, video must by necessity always record and play back at a constant rate. This means that even inexpensive VCRs and camcorders will keep an image permanently in sync. Standard analog audiotape recorders, on the other hand, have a fairly wide degree of slippage. Any attempt to use them to record lip-synced dialog will usually result in the dreaded "lip flap," the effect you've seen in kung-fu epics where an actor's words don't correspond to his lip movements.

This is where, triumphantly, digital audio recording comes in. One of the benefits of digital audio is that, since it's a collection of bytes like a computer file, it has to always record and play back at a constant rate, like videotape. This helps make double-system sound for video relatively easy and affordable compared, say, to the $5,000 it would cost to obtain a crystal-sync audiotape recorder capable of recording sound and playing it back in sync.



Audio Pals: Sony's DAT Walkman and a hand-held wired microphone from Azden.

A digital audiotape (DAT) Walkman or one of the new MiniDisc recorders, which can perform the same functions, can be had for less than $800 at most electronics stores. (This significant difference in price has not, by the way, escaped industry professionals. DAT recorders are often used by low-budget filmmakers who want sync sound capability.)

Although you could, in theory, run both a camcorder and a digital audio recorder yourself, it's much easier to have a second person along to run the sound. This person, known as your sound engineer, will be responsible for turning on the audio recorder at the start of each scene, listening through headphones to make sure the sound you're getting is clear and undistorted, and possibly even holding the microphone close to any people whose conversation you want to record.

If you're recording with two or more microphones, your sound engineer can also "ride levels"–that is, balance the audio to make sure one mic's input isn't significantly louder or softer than any other.

Since it's unlikely you'll be starting and stopping your audio recorder and your camcorder at precisely the same moment for every shot, you'll need a way to match the start of the sound portion of your scenes with the start of the picture portion. This is the reason you always see some person on a movie shoot, the clapper operator, starting each scene by holding out a clapboard, rattling off a reference like "Magnum Wedding, Scene 24, Take 1," then snapping down the top of the clapboard onto the body and getting out of frame before the director yells "Action!"

If you pay attention to what's on the clapboard, you'll see that there are slots for all the information the clapper operator recites. Another part of the clapper operator's job is to change the scene and/or take information every time the camera rolls, either by writing on the clapboard in chalk or by placing a piece of masking tape with the appropriate number in the right slot. This is done so that the editor can identify each take on both the sound and picture portions of the footage, and match the sound of the clapper with the image of it hitting the board. These are both known as "sync points." From then until both the camcorder and audio recorder are turned off, the sound and picture portions of the footage are in sync.

If you don't have a clapboard, you

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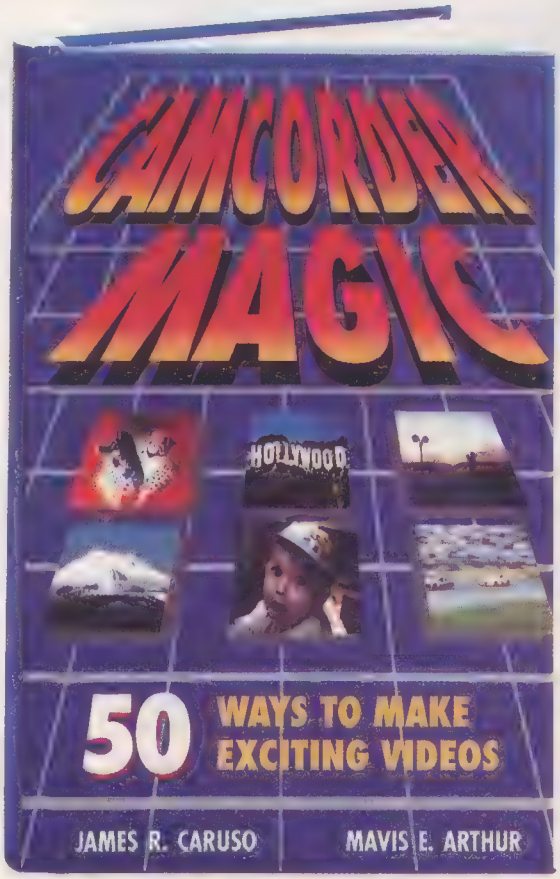

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MORE CHANNELS — MORE CHALLENGE

Those of us in the Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio welcome the challenge and opportunity in evolving the home theater audio system. To be sure, the high end system of the future will incorporate five audio channels, plus subwoofers. More importantly, these systems need to be equally adept with both movie soundtracks and music sources.

In terms of both loudspeakers and amplification, most mass-market products appear to be following the trend of providing five channels for the price of two. Unfortunately, both the quantity and the quality of the sound gets squeezed — and that's a problem.

In fact, multi-channel home theater audio systems place greater demands on both amplifiers and loudspeakers. Investing wisely in quality high-performance audio components will provide the astonishing realism and heartfelt emotion that define the home entertainment experience. That's what the high end is really all about.

Chris Browder, B&W Loudspeakers, President of the Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio

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AAHEA

This column is presented by The Academy for the Advancement of High End Audio, an organization dedicated to the recognition of excellence and the promotion of greater awareness of high end audio.

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Q&A

BY RODERICK WOODCOCK

Queries from our readers

Q I have four VCRs of varying brands. I use most of them only for recording, but I use one, a Panasonic PV-4262, for playback. I don't usually keep track of which machine records what tape, and sometimes weeks pass before I get a chance to review a particular tape. I normally tape everything at the decks' slowest speed, and haven't had any problems with tracking or picture noise.

What is a problem is the occasional whipping of the videotape I experience when I use the picture search, fast forward or rewind controls. I can hear a lot of snapping noises coming from the cassette inside the machine. While the tape eventually settles down, sometimes there are creases or wrinkles that are left in the videotape. What causes this, and what can I do about it?

J. D. Branford
Calgary, Canada

A VCRs are mechanical devices, and despite the best efforts of manufacturers to produce products that conform to the specifications for a given format, variations inevitably creep in. In the case of the tape transport, different VCRs, even identical models from the same manufacturer, may subject the tape to slightly different winding stresses. While one VCR may pack the tape on the reel fairly tightly, another machine may do so somewhat more loosely.

A good VCR (or tape rewinder, for that matter) will deliver a pancake of tape that sits smoothly and evenly on the reel, displaying no visible ridges. When a tape made on one machine is played on another, some adjustment for tape tension must be made. One way to ensure even tension on the player is to also use it to rewind the tape before playback. You could also fast forward and rewind the tape to do the same thing, but that's time consuming and tedious.

Failing this, there's not much to be done about your problem. I've also noticed it, and on different VCRs. But usually the tape slack adjustment is brief, and tape creases like you describe are rare. It's quite possible that one of your record machines is out of spec, and may need its tape tension adjusted. To find out which machine is at fault, start making notes as to which machine records what tape, so that you can track it down later when the whipping problem surfaces.

Q Why do some remote controls have an "enter" button on their keypads while others don't? I've used lots of VCRs and television sets and this discrepancy from brand to brand has always annoyed me. Sony originally didn't provide an enter key on its remote controls, but now it does. What's the advantage? With most other remote controls, it's only necessary to key in two digits to have the VCR or television change channels. I just don't see what the reason is for an enter key.

David Goldstein
Las Vegas, Nevada

A Keypads that have an enter key are allowing for the addition of more channels on cable television in the future, a likely eventuality. If your television or VCR immediately changed channels after you had keyed in the second channel digit, how would you access channels above 99, which require three digits? The enter key delays the channel selection until all digits have been keyed in.

Panasonic's solution was to add a 100 key, especially for higher frequency channels. But that's still another key on the remote control, isn't it? I have remote controls that work both ways, and while it's sometimes tedious switching back and forth between the two systems, I don't consider it much of an inconvenience.

Address questions to Q&A, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001; fax to 212-947-6727; or send via CompuServe to 75147,1255 or via The Internet to 75147.1255@compuserve.com. Questions may be edited for space.

Q I've come to rely a lot on the "time remaining" feature on my VCR. It's a very useful way to determine how much time is left on a cassette. But recently, with many of the T-120 tapes I've been getting, the reading isn't as accurate as it once was. I know that the thickness of the videotape is used to determine the time remaining readout. Is it possible that some newer T-120 cassettes aren't as thick as the tapes I bought a few years ago?

Kurt Spencer
Seattle, Washington

A Your letter sent me on a day-long round up of sample T-120 tapes to test. Some were years old, while others had just been purchased. I used several VCRs with the time remaining feature to determine what sort of readings I would get. Sure enough, many of the newer T-120 tapes gave readings that were shorter than normal. A three-year old 3M S-VHS tape, for example, delivered a time-remaining readout of 130 minutes, while a newer 3M VHS T-120 gave a readout of 110 minutes. Other recent brands from TDK, JVC, Sony, Goldstar and Polaroid, gave readings that varied from 110 to 119 minutes.

Apart from these machine readings, close examination of the reel pack diameter on newer tapes indicates there's more empty room near the edge of the reels. All this tends to confirm your theory that many tape manufacturers are spooling thinner tape into T-120 shells than they used to. Twenty microns, give or take a micron or two, used to be the norm for T-120 tape stock. Then T-160 tapes arrived, with a thickness of about 16 microns. T-180s and T-200s, which have thicknesses of 14.5 and 13 microns, confuse the issue even further. Many VCRs will only compute the time remaining of T-160s or T-120s although some newer Mitsubishi's can accomodate T-180s as well. What many brands are doing is rationalizing their tape manufacturing by making a thinner tape that can be spooled as either a T-120 or a T-160.

Much the same thing has happened with 8mm and Hi8 tapes, where the shorter lengths aren't still necessarily made of the thicker 13-micron stock in use a few years ago. Instead, they are only 10 microns thick, which is the specification for the popular P6-120 tapes that most consumers buy. The downside, unfortunately, is a compromised ability for VCRs that offer time-remaining features to accurately compute that time on some brands of blank tape.

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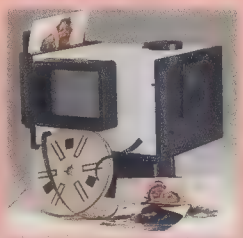

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VIDEOTESTS

MAGNAVOX S-VHS VCR

TEST 772

By Timothy Liebe

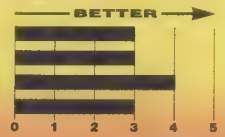
Magnavox's VR9362 VHS VCR shows just how far regular four-head consumer VCRs have come in the past few years. The 9362 is priced at $329 and comes with an hours/minutes/seconds tape counter, audio/video inputs in the front as well as in the rear, and a jog/shuttle dial on the remote. These features, which appear to be more and more common on entry-level VCRs, should be very welcome to consumer videomakers who, while looking to set up a home editing suite, don't want to spend a small fortune for playback decks.

Setting up the 9362 is easy thanks to the various onscreen menus that can be accessed from your remote. It should be noted, however, that the only way to leave a specific menu is by stepping your way back out.

MAGNAVOX VR9362 VHS VCR

PRICE: $329

V-RATING: VVVVV

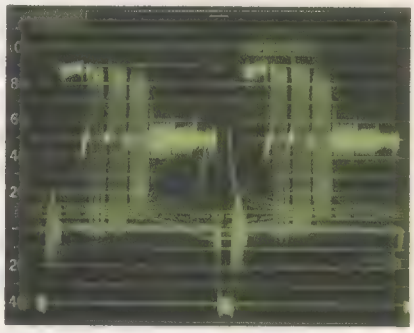


RATINGS ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER VHS VCRs.

The front of the 9362 has controls for most of your basic VCR functions like record, play, fast forward and rewind, as well as channel up and down switches. The power, stop/eject and play buttons are large and well-placed; the record, VCR/TV and channel selector controls are smaller and more closely grouped.

The display panel on the front of the VCR will show you the tape counter, whether your tape is playing or recording, and what kind of sound source you're getting. In order to see whether or not your tape is rewinding or fast-forwarding, or what time it is, you'll need to push the "Status" switch on the remote so those graphics appear on your TV set.

The 9362's remote is one of the less ergonomically friendly I've encountered. All the basic VCR functions, except recording, are located at the top of the unit, with the same-sized play and stop controls placed too close to one another. The record and one-touch record functions are also both the same size and are at the bottom, mixed in among the manual tracking, counter memory and VCR/TV switches. A tiny mute button is at the very top, between the remote's two power switches, which seems to invite errors.



Multiburst waveforms show a frequency response, or resolution, typical for VHS.

VIDEOTEST PHOTOS: LES MORSILLO

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Make and Model: Magnavox VR9362

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 9.7 pounds; 3-3/4 x 14-1/4 x 12 inches

Power Use: 19 Watts

Jacks: Front input video & stereo audio; rear input RF, video & stereo audio; rear output RF, video & stereo audio

Tape Format & Speeds: VHS; SP, LP, SLP

Video/FE Heads: 4/0

Cue & Review Search: locking 5x SP, 15x SLP; non-locking 7x SP, 21x SLP

Visible FF & Rew: no

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 3-1/2 min. for T-120

Remote Control: IR wireless

Program Start Locator/Index/Cue: go-to counter number

Audio: linear mono; hi-fi AFM stereo

Preset Method: auto program, and manual add/delete

Cable Tuning Range: 2 to 13, A to I, J to W, A-5 to A-1, 5A, 37 to 94, 100 to 125

Timer: 8-program/1-month, and OTR

Key Features: shuttle ring, forward jog dial on remote.

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 240 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video 46.2 SP, 49.2 SLP; weighted video 49.6 SP, 49.7 SLP; chroma AM 44.7 SP, 39.6 SLP; chroma PM 41.6 SP, 39.8 SLP

Audio Frequency Response: hi-fi 20 Hz-20 kHz, +0.3/-0.1 dB; linear (-3 dB) 100 Hz-12 kHz SP, 100 Hz-4 kHz SLP

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 84.3 dB

Linear Audio S/N: 41.4 dB

Audio Distortion: hi-fi 0.3%; linear 0.9%

While Magnavox includes the capability to control most major brands of television sets via its VCR remote, there's no corresponding cable box control. If you live in an area which utilizes addressable cable boxes (like most major cities), you're out of luck if you want to change channels using the 9362's remote. This also limits the use of this unit's VCR-Plus feature: In a cable area that uses addressable boxes, virtually every channel you can't get over the air is scrambled.

The jog/shuttle wheel, on the bottom third of the remote, works quite well at frame-by-frame, below-normal, normal and above-normal speeds in forward mode. In reverse mode the shuttle function plays backwards at normal and above-normal speeds while the jog dial

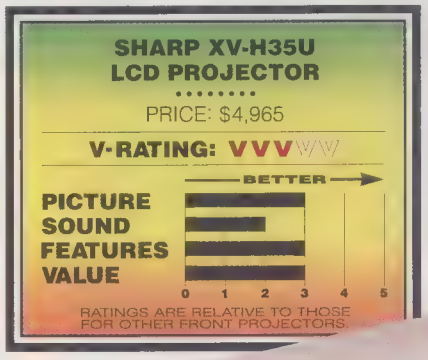
continued on page 36

SHARP LCD PROJECTOR

TEST 773

By Brent Butterworth

Sharp's first LCD projector, the XV-100, led some video experts to predict that LCD projectors would one day push CRT-based designs off the market. But five years later, it still hasn't happened. A few outstanding LCD projectors have appeared, notably Vidikron's Crystal One, but many still suffer from visible pixels, poor contrast and other problems. There's hope, though. With each generation of LCD projectors, manufacturers, led by Sharp, have improved picture quality, added features and lowered prices. As a videophile, I'm always hoping the next wave of LCD projectors will produce a model that competes with low-end CRT projectors by offering an excellent picture at a price between $4,000 and $5,000.



Sharp aspires to this goal with the XV-H35U, a $4,965 video-grade projector that produces images from 25 to 200 inches diagonally. The XV-H35U offers all the advantages of an LCD design. It never requires convergence adjustment, and you can install it in about five minutes. (CRT projectors are tricky to set up and usually require readjustment about once a year.) The XV-H35U is about the size and weight of a typical desktop computer, so you could even haul it to a friend's house for the night.

The rear panel offers two video/stereo audio inputs (one with S-video) and a loop-through video/audio output. There's also a 12-volt output jack that you can use to control an automatic screen (which isn't included). An automatic screen makes using a front projector more convenient. Just turn on the XV-H35U and the screen comes down. Turn the projector off,

continued on page 37

Toshiba's remote is well designed, full featured and illuminated.

TOSHIBA DIRECT-VIEW MONITOR

TEST 774

By Peter Barry

Television sets are so feature-packed these days that it takes a while to sort out how they really perform. This new model from Toshiba, the CN32D90, is a good case in point. This 32-inch direct-view monitor is a no-holds-barred offering with a wealth of features and Toshiba's latest screen technology. Not surprisingly, these attributes come at a price: $1,999 to be exact.

In recent issues we've discussed the merits of monitor calibration as recommended by the Imaging Science Foundation (ISF). With the assistance of Total Media Systems, a charter member of ISF, we will be able to add monitor calibration to our standard evaluation procedure, one more step to help us better understand the monitors we see. This Toshiba is the perfect place to begin because it has a feature that is among the most exciting we've seen in monitors. But before we get to it, let's take a look at what else Toshiba has put into the set.

This 32-incher sports Toshiba's latest offering in the industry's flat-tube sweepstakes. Calling its tube the FST Perfect SuperTUBE, Toshiba boasts that it has the flattest screen for its size on the market. You'll find it in four new Toshiba sets, two 32-inchers, including this model, and two 35-inchers. Because of its flatness it is subject to less visual distortion from side to side and top to bottom. It has evidently achieved the improved flatness on both sides of the screen, on the inside as well as the outside. Many tubes have been flattened in front, only to retain their inside curvature. Toshiba says it has achieved better flatness on both sides. And observations bear this out. The viewing angle is definitely wider and the set shows less glare and reflection—two good qualities.

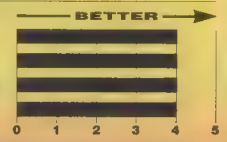
The set also features a good 43-watt, four-channel DSP and Dolby Surround audio decoding system. Packaged with the set are two external speakers with

continued on page 38

TOSHIBA CN32D90 DIRECT-VIEW MONITOR

PRICE: $1,999

V-RATING: VVVV



RATINGS ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER DIRECT-VIEW MONITORS.

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Make & Model: Toshiba CN32D90

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 146.6 pounds, 27-3/4 x 33-1/2 x 22-3/4 inches

Screen Size: 32 inches diagonal

Aspect Ratio: 4x3

Speaker Size: main two, oval 3x5 inches; subwoofer, 4 inches round; rear two, 5 inches round in cabinets

Type of Tuning: frequency synthesis

Method of Tuning: programmable scan on set, scan plus direct access on remote

Preset Method: auto program plus manual add/erase

Channel Coverage: VHF 2 to 13, UHF 14 to 69; CATV A-8 to A-1, A to W, AA to ZZ, AAA, BBB, 65 to 94, 100 to 125

Remote Control: IR wireless with TV/cable-box/VCR/aux control

Inputs: front input 3 S-video, video, left and right audio; rear S-video 1, video 1 & 2, left and right audio 1 & 2

Outputs: rear RF to converter, variable stereo audio, fixed video and stereo audio, left and right PIP audio, L&R main external speakers, L&R speakers

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: main L&R 10 W per channel; subwoofer 13 W; rear L&R 5 W per channel

Key Features: 43-Watt sound system with Dolby surround; 2 external rear speakers with speaker wire; 3 adjustable color temperature settings

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: measured, over 600 lines; on source material, 450 horizontal, 400 vertical

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): video 53.5, chroma AM 62.8, chroma PM 62.2

Screen Brightness: factory: 14 footLamberts; calibrated: 13.15 footLamberts

Color Temperature: warm 7,500 Kelvin; medium 9,100 Kelvin; cool 12,100 Kelvin; calibrated medium 6,600 Kelvin

Accuracy of Colors: very good

Audio Frequency Response: electronics 20 Hz-20 kHz, +1.6/-2.2 dB; speakers 50 Hz-18 kHz

Audio S/N: electronics 67.4 dB

Total Harmonic Distortion: 0.5%

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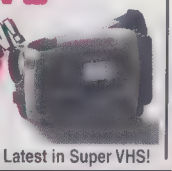

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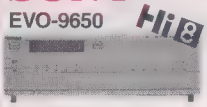

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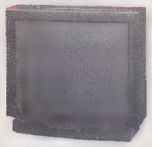

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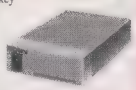

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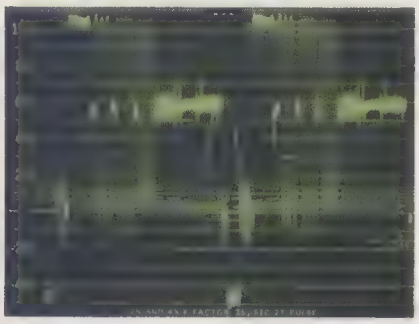
SAMSUNG 8MM CAMCORDER

TEST 775

By Stewart Applegath

Samsung's 8mm SCX904 is the newest of its family-type camcorders. Samsung has produced a solid, workmanlike unit for under $700, with a good 8mm picture and such desirable features as a 12x zoom and a manual focus capability. Samsung has stuck to the basics at a low cost.

With its shoe-like camcorder styling, my first impression on seeing the SCX904 was to take note of its simplicity. Samsung has kept the gadgetry to a minimum. With one exception, the controls are logically-placed and easy to use. Although it is meant to be handled easily in full-auto mode, Samsung has provided openings for manual focus control and a semi-automatic exposure control.



Multiburst pattern shows very good horizontal resolution for an 8mm camcorder.

Samsung should be applauded for including a manual focus ring on the lens. The number of camcorders with this feature dwindles as I write. There are a number of situations where it is advantageous to have this ability. Fully zoomed out, you can focus as close as one inch. The autofocus works well, but moves a bit slowly when traversing from far to very near targets, and back. It took about three seconds to fully orient itself across long distances. On the positive side, the focus mechanism does very little hunting.

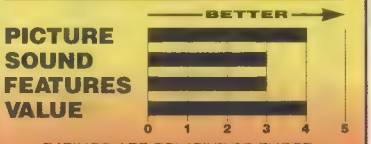
Samsung has also included a 12x zoom lens, a zoom range that's becoming more prevalent. The zoom itself is a slow one-speed mechanism. My finger kept pressing down hard on the zoom rocker switch, trying to hurry it up. If only one speed is available, I would have preferred it to be a little faster.

In our video picture test, the SCX904 performed quite well. Technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite and I measured 300 lines of camera resolution, and 240 lines of resolution on recordings. Color rendition was accurate. Luminance noise was apparent, but better than average.

SAMSUNG SCX904 8MM CAMCORDER

PRICE: $699

V-RATING: VVVVV



RATINGS ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER 8MM CAMCORDERS.

The VCR and playback controls are near the front, on the side of the camcorder. Samsung has made these buttons serve two masters. In camera mode, they function as auxiliary controls: fade, backlight, edit search and

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Make & Model: Samsung SCX904

Weight & Size (h/w/d): camcorder 1.8 pounds; battery 0.4 pounds; 4-1/8 x 4-1/4 x 9-5/8 inches

Power Use: 6 V, 6.5 Watts

Image Sensor: 1/3-inch CCD

Lens: F1.8; 12x (5.4-64.8 mm) power zoom with auto macro at WA

Filter Diameter: 37 mm

Minimum Focusing Distance: WA 1 inch; tele 30 inches

Auto Focus: TTL contrast type, switchable to ring-operated manual focus

Fader: to black, hold-down type

Shutter Speeds (sec.): normal and portrait 1/60, sports 1/60 to 1/250, high speed shutter 1/250 to 1/1000

White Balance: auto

Viewfinder: black and white electronic

Viewfinder Controls: diopter focus, position, brightness and electrical focus

Microphone: mono electret condenser

Jacks: video in/out, DC out to RFU, mono audio in/out

Tape Format & Speeds: 8mm; record SP; play SP, LP

Video/FE Heads: 2/1

Edit Search: 1x

Cue & Review Search: forward 9x; reverse 8x

Fast Forward/Rewind Time: 8-1/4 min for 120 min. tape

Remote Control: IR wireless with self timer, interval timer

Audio: linear none; hi-fi AFM mono

Titles/Graphics: 1 page, 2 lines, 16 characters each, white only

Key Features: manual focus, still frame, insert edit, auto rewind

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: camera—300 lines; EVF—250 lines; VCR—240 lines

S/N Ratios (dB): unweighted video 43.7, weighted video 49.2, chroma AM 44.4, chroma PM 44.5

Battery Life: about 60 min. (man. focus, no zoom)

Audio Frequency Response: 50 Hz-7.5 kHz, +0.1/-3.0 dB; -5.6 dB at 20 Hz, -6.1 dB at 20 kHz

Hi-Fi Dynamic Range: 54.1 dB

Audio Distortion: 0.4%

digital special effects. In VCR mode, you can see high-speed forward and rewind by holding down each button. I found it easy to navigate the dual-use system, though it would have been still easier had the playback buttons been more clearly marked.

Its Digital Special Effects (DSE) package is somewhat of a misnomer, since only a three-tier solarizing effect is available. The fader is to or from black, and its control button must be pushed and held for as long as you want the effect to continue.

The SCX904 is equipped with a 32-character titler, an increasingly rare feature. It alternates with other functions (date/time set and video/picture insert) on a set of buttons behind the viewfinder position during shooting. This location makes it a little awkward to adjust the date and time-set while shooting.

The viewfinder is a standard black-and-white model with about 250 lines of resolution. It has a twist-diopter adjustment, brightness and focus controls, and a very useful battery status icon.

The program auto exposure offers four control settings: auto, for fully automatic control with a 1/60 second shutter; sports, which ranges from 1/60-1/250 second; portrait, which uses a shallow depth of field and throws the background out of focus; and high-speed shutter, which at 1/250-1/1000 of a second, needs more light to obtain a correct exposure. There is no manual white balance control; it's done automatically. The remote control is a wafer thin, credit-card type with regular record/ playback functions, plus interval recording and a self-timer.

Audio was average for a camcorder at this price. Transport noise was average, but not enough to be irritating. There was no zoom or focus noise. It performed better in this department than the Sony CCD-FX730V, which costs $300 more. It would have been nice to have been able to use microphone and earphone jacks, especially since Samsung included an accessory shoe at the front. But the jacks are not included.

The SCX904 has mono sound with audio/video switchable in/out RCA jacks. Samsung has made provision for RF output but a cable is an optional accessory. I think the manufacturer should always throw this cable in with the package. Camcorder users at all levels still use this option in a pinch. Not everyone has a TV with jacks, or connects the TV to a VCR with RCA inputs.

Though I'd like to see a faster zoom mechanism, the picture quality and unexpected features make the SCX904, at $699, a good value as an entry-level 8mm camcorder. A while back, Samsung said it would be raising the quality of its products. With this camcorder and the 31-inch TXC3135 TV that did so well in our recent big-screen shootout (Dec. '94), Samsung appears to be delivering. ■

TECH TIP

Once a year'll do it

Videotape tends to stick after extended periods of inaction, especially if you aren't able to store your tapes intemperate, low-humidity environments. The places where the tape sticks will show up as glitches or other screen irregularities during playback. To avoid this, try to play your most valued tapes once a year, even if you don't bother watching them. When they've finished playing, don't rewind them until the next playback session. Playback winds the tape on the spool with greater accuracy than the fast-forward or rewind features.

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DENON AV SURROUND RECEIVER

TEST 776

By Peter Barry

Rarely do we see such an all-in-one product for home theater at such a price as this latest offering from Denon. The AVR-2500 AV surround sound receiver incorporates controls and circuitry to handle all the duties that most home theaters need several components to provide. In addition, it features Denon's Dynamic Discrete Surround Circuit (DDSC), its own take on surround processing, which it has introduced in its AVR line of equipment.

The AVR-2500 has so much built into it that there's barely room to describe all the features. First, it has an AM/FM tuner offering 32 preset stations as well as RDS, the Radio Data Broadcast system. This system will eventually supply station identifications and allow listeners to search for stations by such categories as traffic reports, sports and music. The New York City area doesn't offer much RDS information yet, but I was easily able to discover this by using the RDS search feature to see what was out there. RDS will become an increasingly necessary and useful feature.

DENON AVR-2500 AV SURROUND RECEIVER

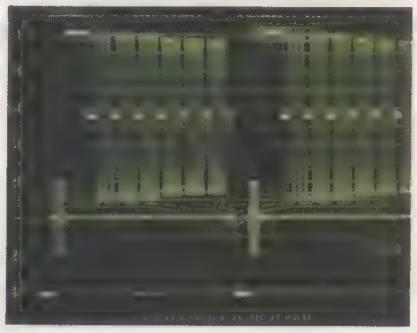
PRICE: $1,000

V-RATING: VVVVV

RATINGS ARE RELATIVE TO THOSE FOR OTHER AV RECEIVERS

The AVR-2500 is also a five-channel power amp offering 85 watts per channel for the left, center, and right speakers in your surround setup, and 25 watts each to the left and right surround speakers. There are 11 surround and simulation modes plus a DSP space simulation mode so you can adjust effects and perceived room size to your heart's content. There are also two special circuits–the audio visual sound effect circuit (AVSE), which boosts bass frequencies for film playback; and Cinema Sound, which equalizes the treble on video sources in a manner similar to THX processors.

The DDSC circuitry is an interesting slant on the decoding chip. Because Denon feels there is too much interference to process five channels of information by a single chip, it has divided the duties between two separate chips. One processes the signal to the front and center channels while keeping it in the analog domain. The second handles the surround channels, DSP, the analog-to-digital and digital-to-analog conversions, and low-pass filtering.



Waveform pattern shows a frequency response capable of high resolution from any video source.

The AVR-2500 also allows multisource applications. A second zone in the house can use a different audio or video source, or different video and audio sources can be selected simultaneously. There are four video and seven audio inputs, including S-video and an auxiliary/game input on the front panel,

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Make & Model: Denon AVR-2500

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 25.8 pounds, 6-3/8 x 17-1/8 x 17-1/8 inches

Power Consumption: 575 W max.

Remote Control: learning IR wireless; switches for Audio-AVR-AVC and VDP-CD/deck-VCR/DAT/TV

Inputs: front S-video aux, video aux, stereo audio aux; rear stereo audio pairs phono, CD, VDP/TV, VCR 1, DAT/Tape and VCR 2; S-video for VDP/TV, VCR 1, and VCR 2; video for VDP/TV, VCR 1, and VCR 2; main amp L & R in, 75-ohm FM and 300-ohm AM antenna

Outputs: stereo audio VCR 1, VCR 2, DAT/tape, multi source, and main preamp out; mono audio out preamp out center, subwoofer; S-video VCR 1, VCR 2, monitor; video out VCR 1, VCR 2, monitor, multisource, two switched AC

External Speaker Connectors: spring loaded clips center, main L & R "A"; center, main, L & R "B", rear L & R

Internal Audio Amp Power: main L & R and center 85 W per channel into 8 ohms, 20 Hz-20 kHz with 0.5% THD; rear L & R 25 W per channel into 8 ohms, 20 Hz-20 kHz with 0.5% THD (in Dolby Pro-Logic wide mode)

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: more than 650 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): luminance and video unweighted 56.2, luminance and video weighted 56.3, chroma AM over 75, chroma PM 59.9

Audio Frequency Response: measured 10 Hz-20 kHz, +0.2/-0.3 dB

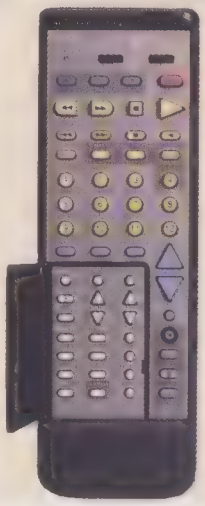
Audio S/N: front 74.6 dB

Total Harmonic Distortion: front channels preamp out 0.01%; front speaker out .4%

and four video outputs and four audio outputs. All these functions can be controlled from the remote, which is an infrared learning remote heavily stocked with popular brand codes.

You can keep track of what you're doing by utilizing one of nine onscreen menus, including source and surround settings. There's also a nifty graphic of a room showing which speakers are on, the volume levels of the center and surround speakers, and a visual sync with the test-tone pattern for setting speaker levels.

Setting the Denon into our home theater system was easy. With the test tones and the onscreen graphic, I was able to balance speaker levels easily, though an SPL meter is still the most accurate method. I listened to a variety of laserdiscs to check out the Dolby Pro-Logic. I found the steering to be quite good. People and objects were well placed in relation to the onscreen image. Panning from side to side was also well handled. Denon's approach to decoding by separating the anolog front and center channels from the digitally processed rear channels, may indeed keep the overall effect cleaner. The two-path system does not, however, call attention to itself by dividing the soundfield. This is a good sign the decoder was doing its job. The widescreen ambience mode, meant to convey the sense of a large movie theater, sounded as if the theater was too empty. Other ambience modes delivered cavernous soundfields, which were fun to play with, but not modes I'd choose for serious listening.



Control Center: Denon's learning remote can control the AVR-2500's multitude of features with buttons recognizable by shape and color.

The AVSE circuit, designed to give "dynamic punch" to bass, helped but did not make a dramatic difference. It is difficult to do A-B listening tests because the receiver cuts out the signal for about a second when it makes changes in mode, producing an audible mechanical click. This was also true when listening to the Cinema Sound equalizer, although the circuit achieves its goal without losing much information, and the roll-off to the treble was necessary on some discs with the Denon's amplifier.

The amplifier delivered enough wattage to fill our large viewing room with sound. Bass was fairly solid and treble was clear with a little edge on some laserdisc sources. This was less true on straight audio, but still was evident. I did find myself wanting more juice than the 25 watts supplied to the surround speakers, but there was enough there when I raised the levels. And our home theater room is a big one. This would be less of a concern in more average sized rooms.

The onscreen menu system is helpful, and the same information scrolls across the 2500's front panel. In future models, I would suggest that Denon

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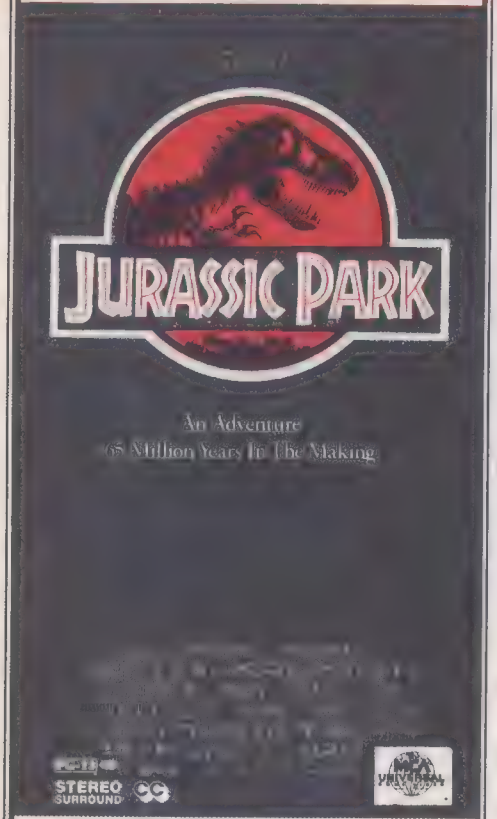

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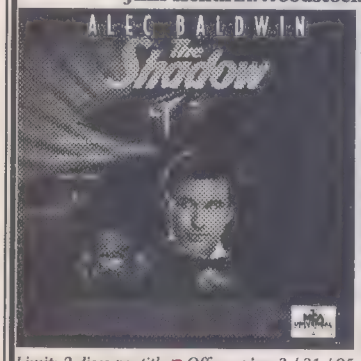

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reduce the size of the graphics since they block the video image, and let the audio run. There's no need for the audio to go silent when settings are being changed.

Denon has delivered a receiver that is chock-full of features and control abilities. It offers as complete a one-piece home theater controller as you'll find. The remote takes a little getting used to with all its buttons, but it does the job. There are plenty of good components in the marketplace today, notably the Onkyo SV717Pro and the Yamaha V870, which are comparably priced, but I don't think you could duplicate the Denon's extra capabilities for the same money. If you're looking for an all-in-one solution to your home theater needs, the AVR-2500 is a contender. ■

VHS VCR

continued from page 29

only shuttles the tape forward.

In addition to jog/shuttle and fast-forward search, the 9362 also comes with a variable slow play mode. While it doesn't work in reverse, it works very nicely in forward play and is a good deal more convenient than the jog/shuttle wheel.

Go for a Jog: The jog/shuttle dial is a nice touch on the remote for Magnavox's 9362 VCR.

The picture is good for VHS, even without any form of image control like sharpness or color saturation. Both the hi-fi and linear monaural audio are very good. Magnavox elected not to include either a headphone jack or control of the record level input.

Overall, Magnavox's VR9362 is a good VCR for home use, with some nice extra features like jog/shuttle and variable slow play added on. If you live in a cable area which doesn't require an addressable cable box, you will also find its VCR-Plus capability useful. I wish the remote were better organized but, overall, the VCR is easy to use and features quality audio and good video. ■

TECH TIPS

Shoe in

Do you need an attachable external microphone, but find yourself without the required accessory shoe on your camcorder (many very small camcorders come without)? Look for a plastic adapter unit manufactured by Sunpak, which attaches to your camera like a battery, and to which you attach the camcorder battery. The current flows through the adapter and adds a shoe-type accessory to the top of the camcorder.

Winter seal

Before bringing your camcorder indoors from a cold temperature outside, place the machine and your videotape in a plastic bag and seal or tie it off. Harmful condensation will form on the inside of the bag, rather than on the inside of your camcorder. Allow the equipment enough time to return to room temperature before opening the bag.

William H. Pendleton
Boxborough, Massachussetts

Recycled monitors

Even though they are obsolete as computer displays, old composite computer monitors can be used with your video equipment. Run an output cable to the monitor from your main TV, or from a VCR. I use an old color monitor for a second TV display in the kitchen and a monochrome display to monitor VCR tape dubbing.

Alan Pippin
Richardson, Texas

LCD PROJECTOR

continued from page 29

and the screen retracts.

Unlike most front projectors, the XV-H35U incorporates an audio system. Consisting of a single three-inch speaker and a three-watt amp, it's intended chiefly as a convenience. You won't want to use it for much beyond talk shows and the nightly news.

A convenient button in the center of the remote control activates the backlight for in-the-dark adjustments. You can use the remote to zoom and focus the picture, set parameters like brightness and contrast, adjust the volume, and change the picture matting. The only thing you'll miss is a tuner, but your VCR can handle that chore.

The matting feature lets you crop the picture so that letterboxed movies have deep black bars at the top and bottom. You can adjust the cropping to accommodate almost any aspect ratio. This feature is especially appropriate on an LCD projector. Because the LCD panels, which the projector's light blasts through, aren't perfectly opaque, an LCD projector can't create deep black bars without the help of a feature like this.

The XV-H35U may be the most user-friendly front projector I've tried. Just plug it in, connect a video source, zoom the picture to fill your screen, focus the picture, adjust the color, tint, brightness and contrast, and you're set. The remote's large buttons and backlighting make it easy to use even in the dark.

Set to a 50-inch screen, the XV-H35U produces a watchable, unremarkable picture. The color rendition was excellent for an LCD projector, and respectable for any type of set. Early LCD projectors suffered from washed-out color, but the XV-H35U produces well-saturated, accurate colors, although I felt the reds were slightly oversaturated compared to its other colors. When it comes to resolution, the XV-35U can't compete with a good CRT front- or rear-projector. The picture looks softer, and the pixels are visible from a reasonable viewing distance at all but the smallest picture sizes. Very slightly defocusing the projector eliminates the pixels.

Like all other LCD projectors I've tried, the XV-H35U produces less contrast than CRT projectors. This simply reflects the state of the technology. After calibrating brightness and contrast levels using a pluge pattern, I attempted to tweak the picture to get deep blacks and bright, but not overly intense, whites. But I couldn't hold the deep blacks while maintaining sufficient brightness. I settled on a setting between deep blacks and a high overall brightness level.

Surprisingly, I enjoyed the XV-H35U most when I pointed it at a white wall and zoomed its picture out to 13 feet, diagonally. Although this is too big for an optimum picture—in fact, no video-grade projector offers the resolution to produce a good picture at this size—it's a lot of fun to watch a TV picture as big as the screens at some theaters.

The XV-H35U shows more of a video image than any monitor of any type that I can remember reviewing. This is a good quality, but it can also reveal timebase errors (lines drawn too short) near the sides of the picture, and other timing flaws in programs you may be watching. I tried the XV-H35U with an inexpensive VHS VCR and noticed no problems at the sides, but some flickering on a few of the scan lines near the bottom of the picture. Of course, these effects are in the video sources, not the projector..

The XV-H35U fulfills the LCD concept. It produces a big, watchable picture without hassles. Because $5,000 is a serious chunk of change, bear in mind that many rear-projection monitors produce a better, although smaller picture. On the other hand, if mobility or space constraints are factors in your installation, the XV-H35U might be a perfect choice. ■

SPECS AND MEASUREMENTS

Make and Model: Sharp XV-H35U

Weight & Size (h/w/d): 24.0 pounds, 8 x 19-3/4 x 17-5/8 (20-1/2 with terminal cover) inches

Power Consumption: 275 W

Screen Size:. 25 to 200 inches diagonally

Aspect Ratio: 4:3

LCD: three 3-inch TFT translucent TN panels

Lens: one F3.6-4.6, power zoom (f105-168 mm)

Speaker Size: one mono 3-inch round

Tuner: none

Remote Control: IR wireless with buttons for backlighting the remote, status check, input check; video adjustment reset, -, adjust, +; masking adjustment -, +, top/bottom, mode; focus up & down and zoom in & out

Inputs: 1 S-video, video, left & right audio; 2 video, left & right audio; wired remote

Outputs: video, left & right audio, 12 VDC to operate screen

Headphone Jack: none

External Speaker Connectors: none

Internal Audio Amplifier Power: 3 Watts mono

RESULTS

Horizontal Resolution: 400 lines

Picture S/N Ratios (dB): video 56.1 dB,

Screen Brightness: varies with screen size

Color Temperature: 6250 Kelvin

Accuracy of Colors: good

Audio Frequency Response: electrical 20 Hz-20 kHz, +/-3 dB; speaker 150 Hz-15 kHz, +/10 dB

Audio S/N: electrical 65 dB; speaker 51 dB masked by cooling fan noise

Total Harmonic Distortion: 0.9%

Bogen 3169 Cine Video Tripod

The Super Lightweight

The 3169 combines Bogen 3001 Tripod Legs with a 3130 Fluid Head. It's easy to use and easy to handle. The Bogen 3001 Tripod is the lightest (about 3 lbs.) and the smallest (folds to 20 1/2 in.), but one of the most versatile tripods we offer.

Top it with the Bogen 3130 QR Micro Fluid Head -- which features a Quick Release Plate that allows you to detach the camera with the flip of a lever -- and you have the ideal set-up for VCR Cameras up to 6 lbs.

Sturdy legs feature 3 click-stop spread angles and are made of tubular hard-finish aluminum and each has a sure-grip, quick-acting, non-fouling lever lock. Add the Poratable Video Dolly or the Lightweight Tripod Spreader and you have rock-solid support for smooth pans and tilts. See the Bogen 3169 Cine Video Tripod with QR Micro Fluid Head at your dealer or contact Bogen Photo Corp. 565 E. Crescent Ave. Ramsey, N.J. 07446-0506 (201) 818-9500

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VIDEO ADVERTISER Q&A

Russell Neale, Sales Manager for Great Valley Products discusses desktop video

Q What are the advantages of using desktop video as opposed to conventional hardware editors?

A The two big advantages of a desktop video system are price and convenience. With the marriage of computer and video, people are now able to do their video editing at a fraction of the cost of conventional hardware editors. We realized this five years ago with the advent of the Video Toaster and the Amiga computer. Our first PC video card, the G-Lock/SVGA+, gives the professional and the hobbyist what they are looking for: a low cost, high quality genlock and overlay board with video inputs and outputs.

Q What should the beginning desktop video editor look for when buying?

A There are a lot of new products on the market and I can understand how people get confused about what to buy. I think the biggest misconception has to do with the "video-out" feature. There are many so-called desktop video products, especially those marketed with the label "multimedia," that proclaim to be video editing tools but they do not have video output capabilities. This means that they can be used only to view video on a PC screen, but they cannot output video and therefore they cannot do any form of video processing.

Along the same lines, there are many multimedia products that do video capture. While this can be fun and interesting for a hobbyist, this capability is not as helpful to a videographer as the overlay and video output features are.

The basic point I'd like to make is that customers have to know what they want. Decide what you want to do, research the products, and then buy.

32-INCH TV

continued from page 29

with long lengths of the requisite speaker wire, so you can be up and running without delay.

Picture-in-picture is getting to be an entity all its own on the latest sets. Here we find a two-tuner PIP with two sizes of windows and four-position placement, all accessible from the universal remote. And a PIP audio output allows you to listen to the inset program with either a wireless headphone or through a second amplifier and speakers.

The remote control is a universal learning remote that is well laid out. The commonly used controls are backlit and easy to use once you've familiarized yourself with them, though some setup buttons under the hidden panel are small and awfully close together.

Okay, it's time for the crunchy stuff. Monitor calibration uses an expensive device known as a color analyzer to read the temperature of white being produced by a set. The TV system in this country calls for a color temperature of D6500 K, or daylight 6,500 degrees Kelvin. All other colors produced by the set stand in relation to this color of gray. Once the analyzer has read the temperature, invariably on the high side of a 5,500-16,000 degree range, adjustments can be made by opening up the set and painstakingly tweaking low and high output color controls for red, green or blue. A hassle, right? Well, kudos to Toshiba for simplifying this process. It gives service technicians the ability to adjust the color controls through an onscreen menu accessed with the remote control.

Toshiba offers three color temperature settings in the setup menu: cool, medium and warm. These settings triple the range of color adjustment possibilities for consumers, compared to the more typical single color temperature of most sets. We like this because the more viewing options we have, the better.

Mike Levy and Kevin Miller of Total Media Systems (516-777-7058) helped us calibrate the color temperatures for the set and this is what we found: Cool (meaning cold-colored, as in blue) measured over 12,000 degrees with a measured brightness of 15.2 footLamberts (fLs). Medium shifted away from blue, accentuating red at 9,100 degrees and 14 fLs. And warm was redder still at 7,500 degrees and 13.1 fLs. The numbers for footLamberts are all acceptable for direct-view consumer monitors; the higher the number the better, up to 30 footLamberts. The 12,000 degree temperature of white is an extremely blue color and beyond the linear operating range of this CRT. But, again, this is not unusual in consumer TVs.

Accessing the color controls with the remote control and Toshiba's onscreen menu enabled us to calibrate this set remarkably quickly. When we first saw this set, out of the box, white images had either a slight blue or red cast, depending on which of the three color temperatures we chose for viewing. This is the look Toshiba has chosen to offer, and it cannot be dialed out with color controls because it is the color of white that you are seeing, not red or green.

After calibration, the set maintained a consistent gray throughout the low and high output spectrums. High output read 6,600 degrees K and 13.15 fLs, and the low output settled in at 6,570 degrees K. Returning to laserdisc source material, we observed a dramatic improvement in color fidelity compared to its original set-up. Colors were more accurate and in proper relation to one another.

The set looked excellent. Skin tones especially benefit from this treatment, and details surface that were never visible before. (We realize everyone isn't going to run out and calibrate their monitors, but doing so helps us better evaluate a TV's capabilities. If you choose to have a set calibrated, be aware that your installer will charge a fee for the service.)

A check of the Toshiba's power supply showed it to be a good one. Frequency response as displayed on a multiburst pattern was very good, meaning the set is capable of good picture detail, with some slight decoder coloration in the top frequencies. The set was also overscanning a bit, but no more so than most other sets at this level. This was most obvious on PIP window frames which were almost invisible except for the left edge.

The Toshiba CN32D90 is a well-made TV with a solid feature package. Its price of $1,999 is on the high side in the 32-inch monitor range, but parts and package quality are evident. For set-up we recommend backing off the contrast control to less than halfway and adjusting color and tint controls while the set is in the warm color temperature setting. The set offers enough set-up options to dial in a look that should satisfy anyone. Plus you'll like the extra speakers and Dolby Surround decoder. Those who are interested in the full tweak treatment will find that much more to like about this set, as it simplifies the process of optimizing picture quality. ■

SPECIAL REPORT

continued from page 20

board.

Toshiba showed the first monitor designed to bridge the gap between computers and TV. The $999, 20-inch Toshiba Integrated Multimedia Monitor (TIMM) includes a TV tuner, composite and S-video inputs, and a VGA input for use with computers. TIMM's dot pitch is 0.58mm, which gives it sharper resolution than a typical 20-inch TV, but less resolution than a computer monitor, where a 0.28mm dot pitch is the norm.

The quality gap between consumer electronics and computers extends to audio as well. The fault lies in computer speakers, which are usually constructed with inexpensive drivers and plastic enclosures that resonate wildly, disfiguring the all-important midrange. With computers finding use for CD playback, CD-R mastering and games with 16-bit sound, it's time for something better than boom-box quality.

Still a few dulcet tones could be found among the squawkers. The Bose Acoustimass multimedia speaker system, introduced last year, again killed all challengers with a smooth midrange and punchy bass. At $699, though, it's expensive for desktop use.

After last year's COMDEX, I was convinced that quality multimedia video and audio were just around the corner. This year, I think that maybe next year, it'll again be just around the corner. ■

HOME THEATER

continued from page 22

independent lighting circuits, programmed from a panel in the equipment room and controlled from a pair of small panels on the theater walls, as well as a wireless remote control, can produce 16 different lighting settings. Tracklight spots light the software and hardware shelves, while two wall sconces gently illuminate the room. The Lutron system dims and brightens any combination of lights, just like at a commercial theater, without generating any electrical interference or noise.

The rest of the system consists of the McIntosh C39 Audio/Video Control Center, which includes Dolby Pro-Logic and THX processing. (The THX is an optional slide-in circuit card.) The ability to electronically control 12 sources, both audio and video, makes this one of the most, if not the most, versatile surround sound controllers on the market. The C39 feeds the McIntosh MC7106 100 watt per channel, six-channel amplifier, plus an additional mono amp for the second B&W subwoofer.

Program sources include the Panasonic LX-900 laserdisc player, which produces a stunning picture with very good audio, and does so more quietly than most players. An older JVC Super VHS VCR and an even older Sony Super Betamax handle tapes. Transmitted programs come from a Toshiba TRX-2220 satellite receiver connected to an eight-foot C-band dish and an RCA DSS receiver with its 18-inch dish. The video feeds the 400-pound Toshiba TW56D90 TV, which because of its 56-inch (measured diagonally) 16:9 screen, made it down the steps to the theater with only an inch to spare. The set produces a sharp picture that can be adjusted to the proper reference color temperature of 6,500 K. Letterboxed laserdiscs look stunning on

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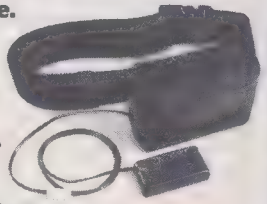

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The theater took 10 weeks and $22,000 to build. It is filled with components costing about as much, and delivers total satisfaction. A considerable amount could have been saved by selecting less expensive equipment, but corners could not have been cut in the construction. You can place $7 in a piggy bank everytime you think of going out to a movie, or include the cost in your mortgage or home improvement loan. Then sit back and discover all the new friends you have. ■

CAMCORNER

continued from page 24

can generate a sync point by having someone stand in front of the camcorder. He or she should announce the scene and take information, then clap hands sharply. While not as useful as a clapboard, you should be able to tell by listening to the single-system sound recorded by your camcorder where in the shoot you are.

When you're ready to edit your footage, the first thing you should do is resolve your sound; that is, match up the audio and video so they're in sync. Begin by hooking up the audio output of your digital audio recorder to the audio input of a VCR with audio dub capability. Cue your video footage up to the first video sync point and put your VCR into audio dub mode. Then, cue up the first sync point on your audio. Finally take both the audio recorder and the VCR out of pause simultaneously.

As the scene plays, watch to make certain the lip movements match what's being said on the soundtrack. Once the scene is over, stop the audio recorder and the VCR, and cue up the sync points for the next scene, following the same procedure.

Double-system sound is a more complicated procedure than you need for day-to-day videomaking. If you're simply shooting family occasions or vacation footage, the single-system sound built into your camcorder should be fine. Most of the time your built-in mic will do a good job.

However, if you need to shoot an event or produce a video where good audio is a must, the extra hassle of shooting with double-system sound may pay large dividends. Although you'll work harder at the time, double-system sound can not only save the day if your camcorder's original soundtrack is damaged, it will definitely help you shape a slicker, more enjoyable tape. ■

Q&A

continued from page 27

Q I just bought a new Sony EV-S7000 Hi8 recorder to go with my TR101 camcorder. I've had the camcorder for about a year, and now have a couple dozen tapes I would like to edit. Which machine would you suggest I use as the player and which as the recorder when editing my tapes?

Victor Chang
Palo Alto, California

A As a rule, a tape plays back best on the VCR that made it. This is especially true with camcorders, many of which use smaller mechanical transports that can introduce jitter and other tape interchange problems if another machine is used as the player. In the case of the Sony TR101, the smaller head drum is more jitter prone than the larger drum used in later models or in Sony's table model VCRs. Playing a tape made on a TR101 on another deck and editing it back into the TR101 will merely compound any jitter problems. Using the TR101 as the player prevents many of these problems.

However, the tinier transport is painfully slow when it comes to winding tape, and excessive shuttling of original footage from point-to-point can induce dropouts. The EV-S7000, on the other hand, has a faster transport, a timebase corrector, and digital noise reduction to help tweak images. It can also take advantage of Sony's RC time code. Your TR101 records RCTC on the tapes it makes, but can't read it for editing. Using the EV-S7000 as a player overcomes this limitation. The EV-S7000 can also generate copyable special effects, like still frames and slow motion tricks, due to its digital circuits. The TR101 can't match these effects on playback.

If you want to add additional audio to your footage, you'll have to do that in the EV-S7000, which offers the dubbable PCM audio tracks. Tapes made on the TR101 leave this space open for later dubbing, but no dubbing is possible on the TR101 itself, although some often use mixers to combine audio sources going from the playback VCR to the record VCR. Note also that since the TR101 is a single-speed VCR, it uses wider video heads than the EV-S7000, which offers SP and LP recording, and needs slightly narrower heads as a result.

The bottom line is that I would use the EV-S7000 as the player and the TR101 as the recorder, as it's the most versatile scenario. ■

Reader requests for hard-to-find tapes and discs

I'm working on a project for the western series *Cheyenne*, which starred Clint Walker and ran from 1955-1963, and am after any and all episodes. Also looking for the movie *Gold of the Seven Saints*, starring Clint Walker and Roger Moore. I'll gladly reimburse any reasonable expenses for VHS copies or trade for any of the shows we have.

Scotty Brooks
2855 Lee City Road
Campton, KY 41301

I've been looking for the following two Big Band titles on VHS: *All Star Swing Festival* (1972), featuring Benny Goodman, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie and Gene Krupa, live at New York's Lincoln Center (I think it was distributed by Vestron Video); and *Lionel Hampton's One Night Stand* with guests like Mel Torme, Gerry Mulligan, Krupa and (I think) Buddy Rich. I think Independent United Distributors put it out. I will reimburse expenses.

Richard V. Riccio
RR 1, Box 215A Cranberry Road
Montauk, NY 11954-9700
(516-668-3059)

I am desperately looking for copies of *The Rebel Son*, starring Alexis Granowsky and Adrian Brunel (1939, British, 88 min.); *Secret of the Black Dragon*, starring Julian Glover and Tommi Ohrner (early '80s, European, 250 min.); and *Casino Royale*, starring Barry Nelson and Peter Lorre (1954, B&W, 50 min.). VHS please; will reimburse expenses.

Rev. Bohdan Demczuk
408 Preston Avenue
Saskatoon, SK, S7H 2V2 Canada

Send requests for hard-to-find tapes to Collector's Clearinghouse, Video Magazine, 460 West 34 Street, New York, NY 10001; or fax requests to 212-947-6727 after 5 p.m., EST, weekdays, or all day on weekends; or send requests via CompuServe to 75147,1255. Include postal address, E-mail address or phone number since this is a reader-to-reader service. Requests for copyrighted material must be for personal use only. You may offer to reimburse expenses, but Clearinghouse is not open to requests for purchase or sale of tapes.

I would like to locate VHS copies of *The High & Mighty* with John Wayne, *A Christmas Memory* with Geraldine Page, and *The Typist* with Eli Wallach and Anne Jackson. I will pay any reasonable expenses.

Josephine Yaghoobian
38 Oems Street
Pawtucket, RI 02861

I am seeking a good quality tape of a program broadcast in late 1992 called *Visions of America*. It included a segment featuring humor writer Dave Barry and the Arcola, Illinois Lawn Rangers lawnmower drill team. I was involved in the production, but I have never been able to find the video. I will happily reimburse any reasonable expenses.

I am also seeking a new or used laserdisc—must be in excellent condition—entitled *Al Di Meola Project Live at the Palladium*. Any direction toward this disc would be greatly appreciated.

Henry E. Binger
2015 Wilcrest Drive
Houston, TX 77042
(713-785-8240)

I am a dedicated collector of movies on video, with a penchant for spiritualistic plots. I am attempting to locate a copy of *The Sole Survivor*, a 1969 TV movie produced by CBS/Cinema Center. I am most willing to reimburse expenses for a copy in good order. Any format, any system will do. Even black and white!

Oswald Ferrer
4405 NW 73rd Avenue
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I am a big fan of the actress Shelley Long and I would like a copy of her video special *Secrets Women Never Share* on VHS. Also, does anyone have her 1990 TV movie *Voices Within*, or the Emmy Awards broadcasts from any of the years between 1983 and 1990? I would be ecstatic if I could trade blank tapes for any of these titles (or for any interviews of Ted Danson and Shelley Long) or reimburse "Clearinghouse" readers for copies.

Robin Roberts
1901 Chase Drive
Saraland, AL 36571

I am looking for several non-*I Love Lucy* items featuring Lucille Ball: The TV specials are *The Good Years* (1962) with Henry Fonda, *Lucy Comes to Nashville* (1978), and *Television Academy Hall of Fame* (1984). The movies are *The Facts of Life* (1960) with Bob Hope, *Lured (Personal Column*, 1947) with George Sanders, and *Lover Come Back* (1946) with George Brent. I will reimburse costs or trade VHS or Beta.
Eric Schwarz
313 31st Street South
Brigantine, NJ 08203

(609-266-0656)
I am searching for quality VHS/S-VHS copies of several rare horror titles: the uncut print of *The Horror of Dracula* (1958), *The Eyes of the Mummy* (1918), *The Old Dark House* (1932), *The Whip and the Body* (a.k.a. *What!*, 1963), the Japanese editions of Argento and Ulci films, plus others. I'd be obliged to any genre collectors who'll drop me a line. I also desire any *Creature Feature* programs from the early '80s, especially *Commander Lisa's Groovy Movies*.

Tyson Blamer
207 South Livingston
Whitehall, MI 49461

I am looking for a good copy in either VHS or Beta of the movie *Red Planet Mars* (1952) with Peter Graves and Andrea King. I also need *The Rains Came* (1939) with Myrna Loy and Tyrone Power, *Arabian Nights* (1942) in Technicolor, and *Titanic*, with Clifton Webb and Barbara Stanwyck. Will reimburse any reasonable expenses.

David A. McClintock
1454 Sheridan Avenue, N.E.
Warren, OH 44483

I am looking for a copy of a TV movie called *An Inconvenient Woman* (1991) taken from the book by Dominick Dunne. It stars Jason Robards and Jill Eikenberry. It was originally shown in two parts with a total running time of 200 minutes. I will pay any reasonable expenses for a good VHS copy.

Terri Pierce
45 Andora Circle
Droville, CA 95966

I am looking for a good quality copy of two movies: *Compulsion* and the 1951 version of *Bird of Paradise*. They can be in either VHS or Beta, with or without commercials, but quality of picture and sound is important. I will generously reimburse all costs and postage.

Donald K. Heffrin
3329 Eleventh Street
Sacramento, CA 95818-4012

I love Mel Gibson. I am looking for the 1988 *Saturday Night Live* episode that featured Mel as host. I am also looking for a copy of his 1980 movie *Attack Force 2*. If anyone can help me I'll gladly send a blank tape along with postage. VHS format please.

April Fairchild
Rt. 1 Box 69-AA

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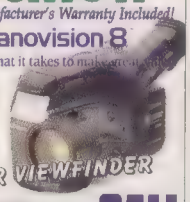

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BY PETER BARRY

GIANT ...STRIDES FOR BIG SCREENS

We compare 7 standard-raising 50 to 55-inch rear-projection TVs

The darkened room was lit by the glowing screens of seven TVs arrayed in an arc. The light was mesmerizing, and we dubbed the scene Screenhenge, an electronic version of the ancient Druidic gathering place. The TVs were big, with screens ranging in size from 50 to 55 inches. The pictures were dramatic, bright and colorful. The sets were rear-projection. And the arrangement showed us in a flash how far this type of TV has come.

Our goal in assembling a cross section of top rear-projectors had been to see how well they compared to each other. But once set up, we also saw how far rear-projectors have come as a group, and how well they stand up to big direct-view TVs. There are still tradeoffs. But it's clear viewers should no longer dismiss rear-projectors on the basis of picture quality.

Rear-projectors have been steadily, incrementally improving, and consumers have noticed. Sales of big-screen TVs have increased by about 30 percent in the past year, and manufacturers expect the trend to continue. The old complaints about dim pictures, washout in bright rooms, poor off-center viewing, and visible scan lines have

Zenith's 52-inch PV5269

Pioneer's 50-inch Pro-97 Elite

been dealt with. In the sets we looked at, brightness levels were excellent, off-axis viewing was quite good, and such picture qualities as detail and focus and less visible scan lines were impressive. Rear-projection TVs have come into their own.

We examined sets from seven leading makers of rear-projection TVs, ranging in price from $2,700 to $5,000. The sets were Hitachi's 50-inch 50UX19K ($3,099), Magnavox's 53-inch FP5360C ($2,699), Mitsubishi's 50-inch VS5055 ($3,199), Pioneer's 50-inch Pro-97 ($5,000), Sony's 53-inch KP-53XBR35 ($3,500), Toshiba's 55-inch TP55D80 ($3,499) and Zenith's 52-inch PV5269 ($2,699).

As a group, this generation of sets has been improved by better screen technology, better cathode ray tubes, and shorter tube-to-screen throw distances. The sets are slimmer than ever; or at least look slimmer, thanks to savvy cabinet designs. All the sets utilized some type of digital processing in their features, adding digital artifacts to the more familiar artifacts that appear in pictures. But this is just a fact of video life in the digitizing '90s.

All the sets also had picture-in-picture windows and good stereo audio. Other high-end features present on one or more sets included two-tuner PIP, Dolby Pro-Logic decoding, external speakers, selectable color temperatures, remote control locators, and second remotes. And one set, the Zenith, boasts a feature you'll be hearing a lot more about in coming months, the StarSight onscreen program guide.

Our video source for the tests was the Pioneer CLD-D703 laserdisc player. Its output was channeled through a JVC JX-S900 switcher used to feed all seven sets identical signals. Connections were made with Straight Wire SilverLink video cable made for us in 25-foot custom lengths by Straight Wire (800-683-4434). The cables were fed into the composite video input of the sets. Our principle laserdiscs for the test were Steven Spielberg's *Always*, the black-and-white classic *Ninotchka*, a Mitsubishi test disc sourced from high-definition film, and Reference Recording's *A Video Standard*.

The review process was one of finer

Sony's 53-inch KP-53XBR35 (left) and Toshiba's 55-inch TP55D80 (right)

Screenhenge:
Editors (from left) Braithwaite, Barry and Applegath evaluating the seven screens.

and finer focus. To start, we examined the sets side-by-side, straight out of the box. When we did so, the pictures were set to what each manufacturer perceived its customers would like. The sets looked so different from each other, just as they would in any showroom, that comparisons were very difficult. Some sets veered toward the blue side of the spectrum, others toward the red. Some were blazingly bright, others less so.

Our measurements verified what we were seeing: No two sets measured alike. But we could see that all the sets had colors that were oversaturated, and each had its contrast setting high enough to be considered overdriven, or past the ability of the power supply to control it smoothly. Technical editor Lancelot Braithwaite and I adjusted each TV's settings, using its remote control much as any viewer would, to obtain the best-looking, least problematic picture. Then we looked at them again. They still varied widely in terms of color and contrast.

Next, we adjusted the picture settings using the test disc *A Video Standard*. This disc is designed to help viewers optimize a set's brightness, contrast, color, tint and sharpness controls using the set's remote. We went through the sets, lowering contrast, brightness and sharpness in nearly every case, while balancing the color and tint controls. Sets that had variable color temperatures were left at either the warmer or middle setting. The goal was to achieve as good a picture as possible without special technicians and expense, just a laserdisc and a few moments' time.

Finally, we evaluated the sets with a color analyzer, after calibrating each set as closely as possible to the NTSC standard of 6,500 degrees Kelvin. Mike Levy and Kevin Miller of Total Media Systems (516-777-7058) helped us perform the calibrations. This additional step allowed us to examine each set according to the standards around which the NTSC system is designed.

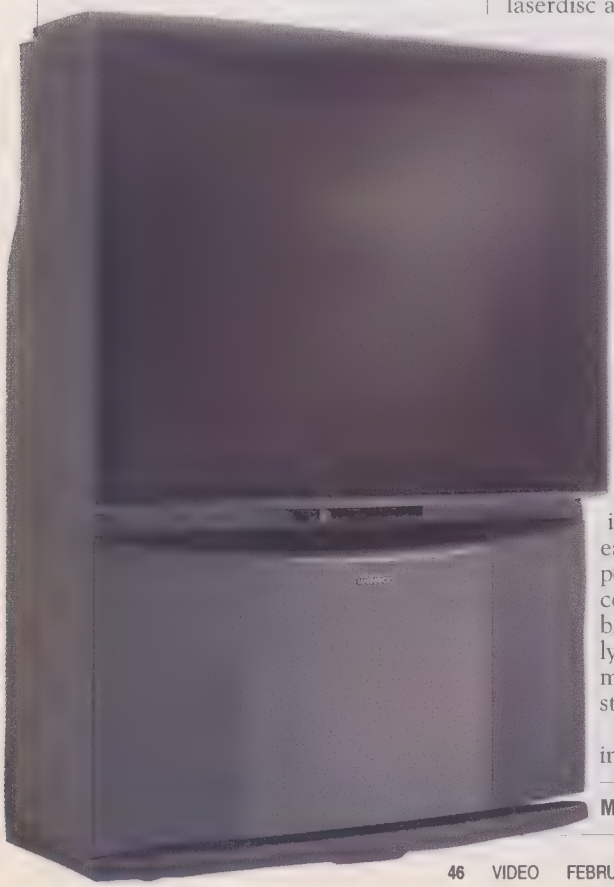
Not all viewers will prefer sets calibrated as closely as possible to NTSC standards. But our goal at this juncture was to establish an even playing field for comparison. With each set near the same starting point for the color gray–which comprises a set's red, green and blue colors–we could more fairly compare their color performance and more easily perceive strengths and weaknesses.

One feature we were looking for was good linearity: We wanted to know which sets could maintain a uniform signal output, which would indicate a stable picture in dark and bright scenes. We also wanted to know which sets had a power supply strong enough to handle bright images without distortion or noise. And we wanted to see which sets would display the best detail, as indicated by a good frequency response on a multiburst pattern. All these features are signs of a well made set, able to produce clear, consistent pictures.

We noticed that all the sets but the Pioneer had internal reflections caused by the CRT optics. This can only be corrected in the TV design stage. However, the reflections weren't apparent during normal viewing.

Our evaluation, both before and after calibration, was augmented by the comments of a viewing panel consisting of editor Stan Pinkwas, associate editor Stewart Applegath and assistant editor Josef Krebs. Black tape concealed the names of the sets. Before calibration, the members of the panel noted their preferences but no clear winner among the sets emerged. Afterward, all were impressed with how similar the video images appeared, yet how subtle differences could now be observed. The extended ocular workout afforded us a good sense of each set's abilities.

Choosing a big-screen TV creates a real centerpiece for your home theater. If you like watching movies, the big pictures will take you a step closer to the theatrical experience. All the sets performed impressively on both the movie scenes and the test discs we watched. But the sets vary in price and the manufacturers have each made choices about the best ways to implement their technology. The Pioneer, which was the most costly, excelled on sheer picture quality, with the



Magnavox's 53-inch FP5360C

SCREENHENGE, PALM POWER: LES MORSILLO

Hitachi's 50-inch 50UX19K

Sony close behind. The Zenith and Magnavox sets excelled as values, while the Hitachi proved itself to be a set with many strengths. Here's a closer look at what we found.

HITACHI 50UX19K

We expected a lot from Hitachi. After all, it makes many of the CRT guns used by other projection set manufacturers. Out of the box, the set's picture was shifted slightly toward green with some hotspots. Color was very stable from left to right, displaying a good, uniform white field. Gray scale delineation was lackluster, which was a surprise. Before calibration, we measured the Hitachi at 29.3 footLamberts (fLs), which was quite bright, and at a color temperature near 6,500 degrees shifted toward the green part of the spectrum. Contrast was too high, although we saw a good power supply, as indicated by the needle pulse pattern. This pattern consists of a black line on a white background and a white line on black background. The lines meet in the middle. A good power supply will hold the line straight when contrast is properly adjusted.

Resolution measured a good 400 horizontal and 380 vertical lines. On the multiburst pattern, which shows the level of detail across the frequency bandwidth, there was a significant peak at 2 MHz, but detail was well delineated on top. Convergence–the size, shape and alignment of the picture–was very good vertically, and a bit oversize horizontally. It was also a bit wide and bowed in both directions, a characteristic known as barrel distortion. Internal reflections were significant. After calibration the Hitachi was fairly linear with 6,540 degrees Kelvin at a high signal output and 6,300 degrees K at a low signal output. We measured 14.8 fLs of brightness (20 is good/excellent).

Hitachi has fielded a solid product for the price. The remote is well-designed and backlit, and can control cable boxes and VCRs. The set has Dolby Pro-Logic decoding and a good sound system with test tones for level adjustment and a one-tuner PIP with four positions and freeze-frame. Overall, the picture was the softest of the group, at times too soft, although this looked great on flesh tones.

MAGNAVOX FP5360C

Magnavox is among the three companies in our comparison whose sets come with a contrast screen (the Pioneer and Sony models are discussed below). The darkened panel helps create deeper blacks. We feel contrast screens are becoming more common because they help give viewers the feeling they are really watching a direct-view monitor by replicating the look of a glass facade that is so familiar with direct-views, and by lessening the visible scan lines. Magnavox's screen is also dramatically curved, with its center more than three inches from the fresnel video screen.

We removed the contrast screen for some of the tests, even though this leaves the perimeter with a somewhat unfin-

Palm Power: Remote controls for the TVs by (top row, from left) Sony, Hitachi, Magnavox, Zenith; (bottom row, from left) Pioneer, Toshiba, which offers two remotes, and Mitsubishi. The Zenith set also comes with a second remote.

Mitsubishi's 50-inch VS5055

ished look. We don't love this trend in the rear-projection market because rear-projection has always struggled in rooms with ambient light. Glass or plastic screens reflect room lights, as well as darken the TV's image.

Out of the box, the Magnavox picture showed good gray scale delineation, but was shifted noticeably toward blue on a white screen, with color varying from blue on the left to orange on the right side of the screen. The color analyzer showed the shift to represent a 2,600-degree temperature drop from left to right. We asked Magnavox about the color shift and the company said it was present in some early units because of a slight pinching of the screen at its attachment points, and that it had been corrected.

Brightness (black level) was set too high, not surprising given the presence of the contrast screen. On the test disc, we observed a needle pulse pattern that suggested a strong power supply for the set. The lines remained straight even while the contrast (white level) was being slightly overdriven at the factory settings. Color was oversaturated, but we found this to be true to some degree on every set. We measured the resolution to be 380 horizontal and 360 vertical lines, the lowest for the seven sets. Convergence was very good. The Magnavox showed above average detail on the multiburst pattern with no noticeable frequency peaks.

The set put out a healthy 29 fLs and was shifted blue to 7,980 degrees overall, with low-level signal output reading a very blue 13,000 degrees (double the standard temperature). Internal reflections from the CRTs were a distraction, particularly when seated off-axis. After color calibration to 6,500 degrees, the Magnavox showed it could track a stable gray scale, and was putting out a more modest 16 fLs.

The remote has a very useful location finder that can be set to beep when the set is turned on. The set has no surround sound decoding, but very good six-speaker audio. It also has RCA in and out jacks reserved for Philips' external ghost-canceler, a long-awaited broadcast picture refinement due this spring. The set's base raises the screen to a height of 26-inches, making it at least five-inches taller than the other models. Rear-projection sets should be viewed at eye level when seated, so you may want to consider this when comparing TVs.

Apart from the color shift, which you should *not* encounter, the set displays a good, bright, big picture. It shows good frequency response and detail, and has a solid power supply. The resolution was on the low side, but acceptable. The set is a very good value.

MITSUBISHI VS5055

Mitsubishi has been making some excellent sets and we were excited to see this offering. Out of the box it had a slight orange cast with some hotspotting, but displayed the most consistent picture, from side to side, of the sets we tested. Gray scale delineation was good. The meter showed the set produced the brightest picture by far in the group at 33.8 fLs at a low color temperature of 6,300 degrees. White field uniformity was poor with the right side of the screen running 1,600 degrees warmer than the left. Overall, the picture shifted heavily toward green on the color analyzer.

The needle pulse pattern on the test disc indicated the contrast was set so high that the set was being driven past its optimum range. Reducing the contrast helped, but the line could not be fully straightened. This suggests a poorly controlled power supply. Resolution was an impressive 400 lines horizontal and 500 vertical, among the best results we obtained. The multiburst pattern showed a heavy peak for information at 2 MHz, which produces ringing around images, and so-so delineation in the higher frequencies. Convergence was good, although the picture was set wide, and there were significant internal reflections. We were unable to access any drive controls (gain) so we were unable to fully calibrate the set. Still, the set performed better when brought down to 7,600 degrees and 27.5 fLs.

We found the remote to be rather large with tiny buttons. The set has average-sounding speakers for a TV set, and audio output jacks for an external surround sound system. The one-tuner PIP features snap-shot, strobe and replay features. At $3,199, the set produces a big, bright picture for the money. But overall the set's not as impressive as other Mitsubishis we've seen, notably the 50-inch VS-5016R from 1992.

PIONEER PRO-97 ELITE

The Pioneer Pro-97, at $5,000, is the most expensive set in the shootout. The aspect ratio is also slightly wider than usual. Pioneer no longer makes sets with a conventional 4:3 aspect ratio in this size range. They are all 16:10.7, about halfway between conventional sets and the 16:9 ratio commonly referred to as widescreen. The Pioneer has a contrast screen designed for easy removal and of relatively low contrast. In fact, it's up to the set's owner to install the screen if that is what he or she prefers.

Out of the box, the picture displayed a blue shift, overall, with slight hotspotting in the center and top and a slight shift to yellow on the right side. Gray scale delineation was excellent, indicating a well controlled power supply. The

continued on page 78

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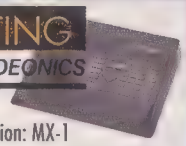

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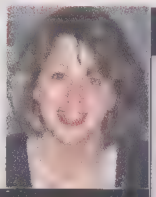

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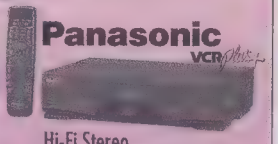

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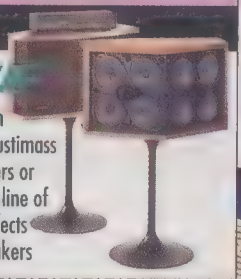

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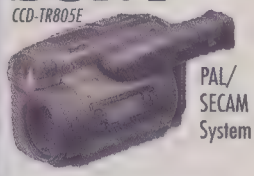

PAL/SECAM System

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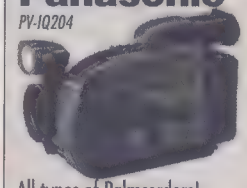

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BY BRENT BUTTERWORTH

Speakers of the House

Six front-and-center trios widen the envelope for high-end home theater audio

Alón II Acarian towers with a C1 center channel: tight bass and a punchy sound.

High-end home theater has finally come of age. Manufacturers who only two years ago said they'd never make home theater products have seen the light, realizing that their talents are just as valued by movie enthusiasts as they have been for decades by music lovers. Almost every speaker manufacturer now pays at least token attention to home theater. In many cases, this attention means simply designing a center speaker to match a pair designed for music. Often, such a simple solution is the best solution. There's no reason a good music speaker can't work well for movies. Add a complimentary center speaker and a couple of good surround speakers, and you have a system that works great for anything you might want to put through it.

Designing speakers is an idiosyncratic craft, though. There are almost as many ideas about what's "right" as there are speaker designers. Many high-end designs are works of art, combining exotic technology, expensive parts and careful manufacturing. Now, a few high-end designers are applying more esoteric ideas to home theater, re-thinking, often rejecting, some ideas held sacred by home theater enthusiasts.

We recently spent many enjoyable hours with a few of these high-end systems. Our goal was to see what the latest ideas have brought to home theater sound. We tried four systems that included two main speakers and a center speaker. They were the Alón II, at $1,950/pair, with a $600 C1 center; the BIC Realta, for $1,199/pair, with a $159 V52+ center; the $1,500/pair PSB Stratus Silver with a $500 Stratus C-5 center; and the $1,600/pair KEF Reference Series Model 1 with a $500 model 100 center speaker.

We also tried two systems that included surround speakers: Counterpoint's $1,295/ pair Diplomat, with a $495 Bijou center and the $795/pair Mystic THX dipole; and Unity Audio's Signature 3 ED main speaker, for $1,895/pair, assisted by Unity's $995 CCFX center speaker and Ambience surround speakers, priced at $795/ pair.

I auditioned the speakers in *Video Magazine*'s 5,500-cubic-foot home theater room, using a Pioneer CLD-97 laserdisc player, a Proceed PAV surround processor/preamp, a Parasound HCA-

1206 six-channel amplifier, and Monster THX-certified interconnects and speaker cables. I used a Hitachi 53-inch rear-projection TV set, and placed each center speaker on top of the set, using small brass cones to point the speakers down to the listening position. I positioned the main speakers according to the manufacturers' instructions, and fine-tuned the positioning for the best sound.

To audition the systems that lacked surround speakers, I used M&K THX dipole surround speakers, which fire forward and backward. These speakers make a great match with high-end front speakers, as would almost any with a dipolar or bipolar design. They provide a diffuse dispersion pattern that helps them blend with the front speakers. We hope more high-end manufacturers create dedicated surround speakers to match their front speakers.

For movies, I used the PAV's Dolby Pro-Logic mode and calibrated each system to Dolby reference level (105-decibel peak). For music, I switched the PAV to stereo bypass, shutting off the center and surround speakers, and turned the volume down seven decibels. I used four of my favorite laserdiscs: *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Dick Tracy*, *The Abyss* and the THX *WOW* demo disk. I also listened to a variety of CDs, ranging from straightahead rock like the Cult's *Electric* to a Fritz Reiner/Chicago Symphony Orchestra recording of Strauss' *Don Quixote*.

For the most part, I experienced the kind of exceptional sound that made me want to keep listening. As far as I'm concerned, systems like these are the smart way to go for home theater. You get fabulous sound on movies and music, with few compromises either way.

The BIC Realta and V52+ center channel: good sound at a reasonable price.

ALÓN II

Alón's unusual, organic-looking speakers have won a strong following among audiophiles. The box housing the Alón II's 10-inch woofer looks conventional, but the five-inch midrange will turn a few heads. There's no enclosure around it, just a plastic cage in the rear to protect the driver (a tiny sandbag damps the vibrations of the cage). The one-inch metal dome tweeter sits on top. The idea behind this design is that the midrange acts as a dipole speaker, projecting forward and backward for a more spacious sound. The center speaker also employs a dipole design, with front and back midranges and tweeters.

Right away, I could tell the Alóns had a lot going for them. The bass was by far the tightest and punchiest of the speakers I auditioned. Even hard-core home theater nuts won't feel the need for a subwoofer. The dramatic soundstaging gave *Indiana Jones* an increased sense of depth, and accurately etched the members of the Chicago Symphony into the space between the speakers. And the center speaker integrated very well with the mains.

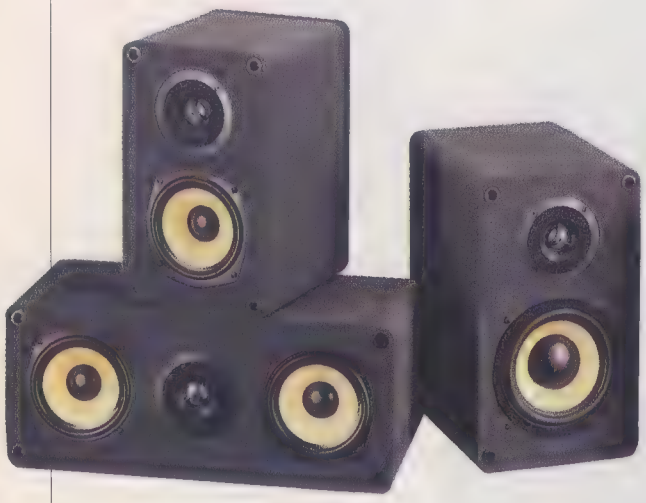
The Alón's midrange struck me as less successful. It sounded simplified, lacking subtlety and smoothness. The well-recorded piano on Holly Cole's *Don't Smoke In Bed* CD sounded like it was coming from an inexpensive speaker, even though the highs and lows impressed me tremendously.

I recently had a chance to try a pair of Alón Vs, which displayed the same characteristics. The Alón IIs weren't my favorites, but I'm bucking a trend here, since I know some very with-it audiophiles who love 'em. Give them a listen and see what you think.

BIC REALTA

Although the Realta costs less than all but one of the other speakers I tried, it's BIC's most expensive speaker by several hundred dollars. BIC's design goal for the Realta was to create a speaker that sounds good, plays *very* loud and doesn't cost a fortune. Without question, the Realta achieves these goals. The Realta packs two 10-inch woofers, two five-inch midranges and a one-inch metal-dome tweeter. The fit and finish compare with those of speakers typically costing $3,000. BIC's five-feet tall towers could be considered a dramatic monument to your dedication to home theater, but they could also be considered a melodramatic design statement. You'll have to make the call on how they would look in your home installation.

The sound, however, should please



Counterpoint's Diplomat mains and Bijou center channel: compact and remarkably real.

anybody. The Realta is the least expensive good-sounding, full-range speaker I've found. It sounded rough out of the box, but a couple of nights playing rap at full volume tamed it. It's not an especially delicate or detailed-sounding speaker, but it gets the timbres of instruments and voices right every time.

The midrange isn't the smoothest I've heard from a $1,200 speaker, but I was more than happy with it. The highs are crisp without sounding etched or harsh, and the soundstaging was quite good. In our room, the bass sounded too pronounced on jazz CDs, as if someone had turned up the bass control on a receiver, but perfect for home theater, rock and symphonic music. An A/V receiver's tone control, by the way, can lessen this effect.

Best of all, the Realta plays *loud*. I cranked up the Cult's *Electric* to produce 110-decibel peaks at the listening position (128 dB at the speaker!), and the speakers still sounded good, refusing to distort and never at all sounding strained. Its one flaw is that BIC doesn't make an appropriate center speaker to go with it.

The company's inexpensive V52+ center channel speaker failed to match the Realta's high quality. Like most inexpensive centers, it gave an unpleasant edge to dialog. Until BIC creates a center speaker worthy of its Realta, I recommend substituting the PSB Stratus C-5 center speaker.

But for those who want good sound at a reasonable price, and who want to crank it up on occasion, I heartily recommend the Realta. Wish I had room for a pair.

COUNTERPOINT HOME CINEMA SYSTEM

Counterpoint took the best of both worlds–home theater and stereo music–when it created its Home Cinema System. The Mystic surround speaker uses the dipole design mandated for THX certification, while the Diplomat main speaker uses a classic two-way design proven for music reproduction. The Bijou center speaker employs the horizontal design that works well esthetically on top of a TV set.

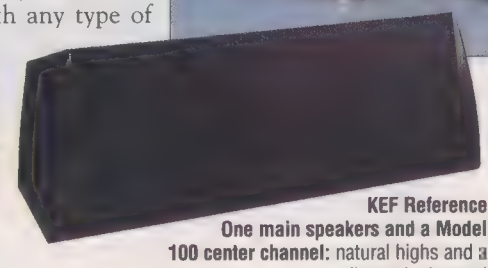
The Counterpoint system pretty much meets my every need in a speaker. It sounds fabulous, it's compact and it's reasonably priced. When I first tried the Counterpoint system, I sat up until 2 a.m. sampling dozens of laserdiscs and CDs, amazed at the system's ability to reproduce every one almost perfectly.

The Diplomat speaker incorporates a six-inch woofer and a one-inch metal dome tweeter. Counterpoint offers a $795 THX-certified subwoofer to go with it, but the Diplomat produces enough bass so that you don't absolutely have to use a sub. The Diplomat reminds me of B&W's Matrix 805, which costs about $400 more. Both render remarkably real sonic images, both offer very even frequency response, and both sound great with any type of program material.

The Bijou center speaker integrates quite well with the Diplomat, producing smooth sonic pans across the front. Through the Bijou, dialog is very distinct and sound effects come through with a punch rare for a small center speaker. The Mystic THX surround speaker produces realistic surround effects that blend beautifully with the front speakers. The Counterpoint system scores, no matter what your tastes or the size of your listening room. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone.

KEF REFERENCE ONE

The concentric Uni-Q driver design used for many of KEF's speakers makes them stand out in today's crowd of conventional two- and three-way designs. The Reference One's Uni-Q places a one-inch dome tweeter behind a 6.5-inch midrange speaker. The tweeter beams the highs through the midrange's voice coil. The design's biggest advantage is that it acts as a "point-source." All the sound emanates from the same spot, and doesn't change as much when you move up and down or side-to-side. To extend its bass response, the



KEF Reference One main speakers and a Model 100 center channel: natural highs and a well-matched sound

PSB's Stratus Silver speakers with a C-5 center channel: smooth response, clear dialog and a spacious sound.

Reference One adds a conventional 6.5-inch woofer near its base.

I found the Reference One appealing, thanks to outstanding imaging, natural-sounding highs and a smooth midrange. However, the bass output proved disappointing for a sizable tower speaker costing $1,600/pair. (KEF's $2,300/pair Reference Two speakers offer considerably more bass and an even smoother, more subtle midrange.) Because the model 100 center speaker uses the same Uni-Q driver as the Reference One, it matches the Reference One's sound beautifully.

PSB STRATUS SILVER

PSB has earned a reputation for producing great speakers at every price level from $200 to $2,000. The Stratus Silver sits one notch below the top-of-the-line Stratus Gold. It features two 6.5-inch woofers surrounding a one-inch dome tweeter. The fit and finish of the Stratus Silver set a new standard in its price range. The black-lacquered sides with metal trim should make this speaker welcome even in extremely design conscious homes.

The Stratus Silver excelled sonically as well. My listening notes were short; I could find little wrong with the speaker. The response was smooth in all registers, resulting in stunningly neutral renderings of all the movies and music I listened to. The bass was tuneful and punchy, although sometimes ever so slightly bloated in our room.

These speakers outclassed all the others in soundstaging, throwing sonic images all the way to the side walls of the room. This broad soundstaging made the Stratus Silvers blend better with the M&K surrounds than any other speakers I tried.

The Stratus C-5 center clearly beat the pack. Its twin tweeters echo the design of THX main speakers, which have controlled vertical dispersion to increase dialog intelligibility. Indeed, the C-5 produced the clearest dialog I've heard from a horizontally oriented center speaker. Confining the dual-tweeter design to the center leaves the main speakers free to create a spacious sound for music.

The PSB system earns an enthusiastic recommendation. Like the Counterpoint system, I can't imagine anyone disliking it.

UNITY AUDIO SIGNATURE 3 ED

Unity Audio's Bob Grost seems to have put more creative thought into his home theater system than just about any other speaker designer. His concept employs two conventional main speakers, unusual surround speakers and a completely unique center speaker. The Signature 3 ED main speaker varies little from high-end norms. It uses a conventional seven-inch woofer and a one-inch dome tweeter mounted near the top of a tower enclosure. A second woofer mounted near the bottom, facing backward, augments the bass. The wooden Signature 3 ED easily ranks as one of the most handsome speakers I've tried. A more solid Corian version is available for an extra $845/pair.

The Ambience surround features two four-inch dome midranges in a dipole configuration, one pointing forward, one pointing backward. Grost designed the Ambience for corner mounting. A one-inch dome tweeter points from the edge straight at the listener.

The center speaker supplies three sets of binding posts. You connect the center speaker to all three front amp channels, so it's in parallel with the main speakers, yet still gets its own signal. A filter network inside the center speaker keeps most left and right signals out of the center. Only a small amount of high-frequency left and right signal actually passes through the center, and the cen-

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Unity Audio's Signature 3 ED & CCFX center speaker: exceptional detail and smooth response.

BY GEORGE MANNES

MY STORY, MY WAY

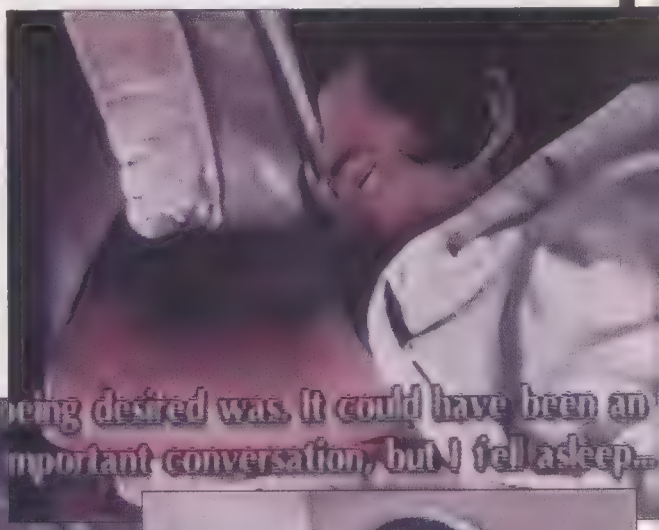
Video diarists, armed only with camcorders, are turning their lives into art, and the art into films.

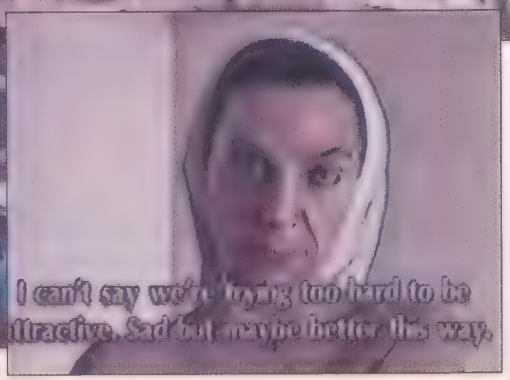
There's a sad, beautiful moment near the end of the recent video release *Silverlake Life: The View From Here*. After an hour chronicling the pain of two California men who are slowly dying of AIDS, the tape seems to offer a glimmer of hope. We see a closeup of one of the men, Tom Joslin, a filmmaker and film professor. He's wrapped in a towel and sitting on a deck chair. From behind the camera, Mark Massi, Joslin's companion and the other subject of the film, announces, "Here we are, having our fabulous European ocean cruise." For an instant, there is hope. You think, great, Joslin is snatching one last bit of pleasure from life.

But then, reality reasserts itself. The camera pans across a California hillside. Joslin and Massi haven't gone anywhere. They're still on the balcony of their apartment, and Joslin's broken speech reveals his debilitation: "So we'll keep tracked, further inputs on our journey, shorter than we thought it was gonna be, but then, that's life." He manages a smile, and you think of all the ocean cruises Joslin will never get to take.

A sensitive, revelatory document, *Silverlake Life*, was broadcast on the PBS series *P.O.V. (Point of View)* in 1993 and has gained further attention on the video-festival circuit. It's also in the forefront of a new kind of art form–the video diary, shot for the most part with consumer camcorders. This increasingly popular form merges the personal journal, the nonfiction film, and television. It can range from private moments like Joslin's and Massi's "European ocean cruise" to wild adventures with a unique, you-are-there slant. Most of the events camcorders capture might be the stuff of written diaries, but instead of *reading* about the private moments people experience, we can *watch* them happen in real time. Video diaries have the power to illuminate the lives of its creators in ways audiences might never otherwise experience.

Silverlake Life is an unusually moving example, but it's not the only one. *Double Blind*, a video by Sophie Calle and Greg Shepherd, chronicles a tragi-comic cross-country trip by two apparently mismatched souls. Then there's the extraordinarily ordinary life of James Wagner as documented by James Wagner in *Clintonville Confidential*, a public access cable show that's been running longer than





Uneasy Riders: *Double Blind's* Shephard (right and above) and Calle cross the continent taking notes.

Legacy on Tape: *Silverlake's* Tom Joslin at rest (right) and reaching for a pail at a hardware store, and his companion Robert Massi (below).

Roseanne. (For a look at the fictional side of video diary making, see *The Truth, and Anything But the Truth.*)

These videomakers approached their stories with levels of professionalism ranging from considerable to none, and with budgets best described as minimal. But they were all armed with the essential tool of the video diarist–the camcorder. Remarkably, their camcorders were all widely available models. Consumer camcorders are inexpensive to use, compared to the costs of shooting on either film or a professional video format. They're easily learned by non-professionals, and small and portable enough that a diarist can carry one around ready to use at appropriate moments while remaining unobtrusive.

"The small format allows for a flexibility, a spontaneity, an intimacy that works well in a diary setup," says Peter Friedman, a former student of Joslin who completed *Silverlake Life* after both Joslin and Massi died. The JVC S-VHS-C camcorder Joslin used to shoot most of *Silverlake Life* had another important advantage for this particular project, according to Friedman–its lightness. Though Joslin had previously shot diaries using 16mm film, there were times when Joslin "couldn't even lift a camcorder, and he certainly couldn't have lifted a 16mm camera," Friedman says. "He was physically too frail to shoot it any other way."

Silverlake Life is full of moments that dramatize the everyday trials of its creators in their struggle against death. Joslin goes to the hardware store to buy a trash can, but feels too weak to pull a pail out of the stack sitting on a shelf. When Joslin and Massi swim in a pool, their hostess asks Massi to put his shirt back on because his AIDS-related lesions might disturb her other guests. Joslin explodes with anger in the car one day when Massi wants to run one more errand, while he just wants to go home.

From a diarist's point of view, the most important effect of the camcorder is the way it breaks down the usual barriers between a documentary maker and a documentary subject. In most non-fiction video, the people who tell the story aren't those whom the story is about. On one side of the camera stands the subject. On the other, stand camerapeople, sound technicians and producers. But in a video diary, shot with a light, compact consumer camcorder, the subject and maker are the same.

Friedman, an independent filmmaker, is acutely aware of what this means. No matter how many times he has seen people living with AIDS, he says, "There's always a gap between what they're experiencing and what I'm seeing, no matter how close I think I am." First-person video, he explains, offers "an intimacy that can't be achieved any other way." He recalls a scene in *Silverlake Life* in which Massi dances around the room while Joslin tapes him. "It was such a fragile moment that if you had to stop everything and set things up, it would have disappeared."

ROAD WARRIORS

Joslin was a filmmaker before he started *Silverlake Life*. But Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard, makers of the 76-minute *Double Blind*, had never shot any video before starting their project in 1992. Calle was an artist and photographer living in Paris. Shephard was a former art dealer living in New York City. Having met once in a bar, they enjoyed an unsteady trans-Atlantic relationship. When Calle landed a teaching job in California, they decided to rendezvous in New York, buy a matching pair of camcorders and document their cross-country trek to reach Calle's teaching assignment.

Double Blind comes from the tape they shot along the way. It turns out to be a record of their roadtrip through hell. The relationship is a minefield, though they marry en route. Shephard disappoints her from the moment her plane arrives in New York. "Instead of meeting me at the airport," Calle says in *Double Blind*'s prologue, "I found him asleep in his apartment. He hadn't left for a week. Nothing had been done. The car was not ready. The cameras not purchased. He had lost his driving license, not said good-bye to his friends, not cleaned the trunk. Any excuse would do." Calle realizes his heart isn't in the trip, yet they hit the road anyway. They're linked by the car, the meals, the hotel rooms they share, but separated

My So-Called Life: James Wagner sets the stage foranother episodeof *Clintonville Confidential.*

by the lopsided nature of their relationship and the thoughts they keep to themselves.

As they travel west, in a jagged route that takes them to New Orleans and Las Vegas, signs of their troubled relationship abound. During their first meal on the road, Shephard makes small talk about a pegboard game at a diner. Speaking to herself in French, Calle wonders, "The funniest thing is that he is playing solitaire. Is this emblematic of the trip?" It is.

Shephard's mind is far away. He calls one woman in New York. He writes to another. He looks at Calle and thinks, "She looks good with a cigarette. I wish I was more in love with her." He seethes because he has no money and Calle runs the show. "I'm reduced to stealing $2 every time we stop for gas," he says. The trip is punctuated by two sad motifs. The car seems to break down daily. Blaming Shephard, Calle totes up the time and money spent fixing it. And on too many mornings, she turns the lens of her camcorder on their rumpled bed and expresses her disappointment: "No sex last night."

As the tape continues, the thought occurs to the viewer that these two should go their separate ways. But as they near Las Vegas, Calle broaches the idea of marriage. She wants it. Shephard is not so sure. As they discuss it, you feel like you're watching a horror movie, and want to yell, "Don't go in the basement!"

But no, Calle and Shephard get married, in their ailing Cadillac at a drive-up wedding chapel in Vegas.

Double Blind straddles the line between reality and theater. Confirming that he and Calle did actually marry, Shephard calls *Double Blind* "fiction and truth kind of put together." The video is obviously the product of a lot of editing with added voiceovers. But Shephard and Calle say they didn't tamper with the chronology, and that the voiceovers accurately reflect their thoughts and written diaries, although Shephard allows that some commentary may have been rearranged. And though he says he feels great affection for Calle, Shephard admits to some self-consciousness about how the marriage would look in the diary he was making. On the morning he agreed to marry, he says, "I woke up and realized, Greg, you don't have a movie if you don't have a wedding because there's no point otherwise." The two are now divorced.

Despite the artifice, *Double Blind* feels authentic. Shephard's and Calle's decision to record their experiences on matching Hi8 camcorders by Fuji allows audiences to see a fascinating episode in a troubled relationship. Audiences have responded well to the approach. The tape has been shown at the prestigious Whitney Biennal Museum exhibit in New York, as well as at the New York

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The Truth, And Anything But The Truth

While camcorders make video diaries practical, the diaries they inspire don't have to be real. Just ask Scott Saunders, the Brooklyn-based director, who co-wrote and produced a feature film that was shot on Hi8. *The Lost Words* tells the story of Charles, a New Yorker who's having romantic difficulties with his girlfriend Marcie. The clever premise of Saunders' film is that what the audience is watching is not fiction, but a home video commissioned by Charles who has persuaded a character named Joe to document Charles' life. "He's willing to shoot the movie for me without pay as long as I feed him," says Charles. "I told him it's about love, and now he thinks he'll be filming a lot of sex scenes and stuff." (He doesn't.)

Part of the reason Saunders made *The Lost Words* on Hi8 was cost: "I had a cast, a crew, a script, but I didn't have much money," he says. So he bought a Sony CCD-V5000 Hi8 camcorder and started rolling. But style was another reason for the choice of tape. Video allowed Saunders to shoot in the relaxed manner he wanted. "If a scene wasn't right, we'd just shoot it again. We didn't have to worry about the incredible expense of film stock," he says. "With film, you have to rehearse like crazy and hope your actors get it right on the first or second take," says Saunders. "With video, you have the freedom to play around."

After transferring *The Lost Words* to film, Saunders took it to film festivals. Last year, the movie played in Dallas, Los Angeles and New York City. At presstime, Saunders was planning brief theatrical runs in Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Columbus. Meanwhile, he's busy writing the script for his next movie. "One way or another, we'll start shooting in the spring," Saunders says. "If somebody gives us a lot of money, we'll shoot it on film. If somebody gives us a little money we may shoot it on Beta," meaning the professional Betacam tape format. "If nobody gives us any money, we'll shoot it on Hi8." —GM

The Lost Words

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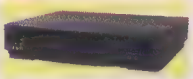

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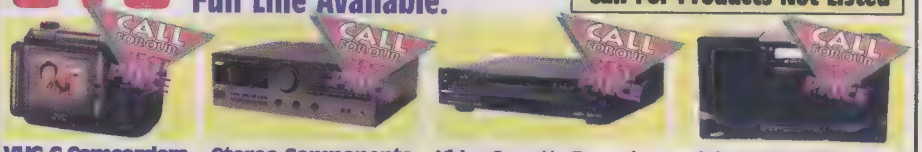

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BY GORDON MCCOMB

10 WAYS

to improve your VCR's picture

When you want to make a good impression, you spend time making yourself more presentable. Each step from a shave to a shine only improves your appearance a little, but the effort adds up. It's the same with VCRs. A few refinements to your video system can virtually banish washed-out pictures, dropouts and hum from recordings made on your VCR. Not all refinements involve the VCR itself. It's equally important to pay attention to the tape you choose, the way it's used, your cables and connections, and the sources you record from. The improvements you can make are relatively simple to implement. In fact, you're probably already doing some. But they're also easy to overlook. If you use the tips below as a checklist, the images recorded by your deck will never look significantly better. Here then, are ten fundamental ways to coax maximum picture performance from your VCR.

1 THE RIGHT TAPE

Quality varies among brands of videotape, but you shouldn't handicap yourself by depending on off-brand blanks acquired at the five-and-dime for 99 cents each. If it's not a recognizable brand, it's best to steer clear. Cheap tape can ruin picture and sound, and even harm the insides of your VCR by shedding little specks of tape. Name brands, like BASF, Polaroid, Fuji, Sony, JVC, TDK, and Memorex, among others, have reputations to uphold, and offer better quality control. Though they cost a bit more, the superior quality is well worth it.

Videotape is available in numerous grades, like octane ratings for gasoline. However, the grades don't reflect industry-wide standards, making it hard to know exactly what you're getting. Most quality tape makers offer two or three grades, typi-

DAVE CUTLER

cally "standard," "high grade" and maybe an additional "super grade." Standard grade is fine for most recording tasks, like time-shifting *The Simpsons*. For tapes you want to keep, use a higher grade. You'll find the picture comes out a little sharper, the colors don't bleed as much, and the tape lasts longer. *Video Magazine's* own tape tests showed excellent results with Fuji's A/V Master and Maxell's Black Magnetite HGX Black in VHS; Fuji's Super-VHS Pro ST-120 and JVC's Super VHS Pro XZ 120 in S-SVHS; Fuji's Super DC P6-120 and Maxell's HGX-M in 8mm; and Fuji's ME Super Double-Coating E6-60 and Sony's Metal-E 120 in Hi8.

Regarding tape life, remember that nothing lasts forever, including videotape. While tapes can remain stable for about 300 plays, even the best tape eventually starts to show signs of wear, which may manifest itself as tiny onscreen zits and dropouts. Two ways to keep picture quality high are to avoid using old tapes for new recordings and to throw out tapes that show obvious signs of wear. You might also, as a rule, stick with standard T-120 tapes, instead of the longer T-160 cassettes. The tape on the T-120s is thicker and more durable.

When using a new tape, start by recording a minute of black screen. Since dropouts tend to be heaviest at the beginning of a tape, by recording material you don't care about at the beginning, any dropouts you encounter are less likely to interfere with your programs.

2 AVOID THE SP BLUES

You've surely heard this, but it's worth repeating. If recording quality matters, use only the fast SP (standard play) speed, even if it means you'll be able to cram less material on the tape. Avoid the slower LP and EP (also called SLP) speeds, because the picture and sound aren't as good, especially if your VCR has only two video heads. On VCRs with four or six video heads, some heads are designed to improve picture quality on EP recordings.

You'll also want to avoid the middle LP speed because VCRs lack video heads that are optimized to improve LP quality. In addition, many VCRs can't display a still-frame in LP or fast-search through an LP picture. There is so much video noise in an LP picture that VCRs can't generate a stable picture in special-effects modes. So, instead of showing a jumpy, noisy picture, the decks go to black when you press the fast-scan or still buttons.

3 CLEAN THE DECKS

Have your VCR cleaned and serviced by a professional every year or two. Though it might not seem obvious, cleanliness counts. A VCR with dirty insides can interfere with picture quality. Between check-ups, use a head-cleaning tape to remove the magnetic oxide build-up inside the VCR. Do this every couple of months, or whenever the picture begins to look snowy. Use the cleaning tape even if your VCR has a built-in video head cleaner, as the cleaning tape covers the entire tape path, not just the video heads.

As always, follow the directions to the letter when using a head-cleaning tape. Misuse can damage your VCR. Many brand-name cleaning tapes, like the Scotch VCR Head Cleaner Plus, provide onscreen cues so that you don't overuse the tape. While you're at it, use isopropyl alcohol to clean the connectors on the front and back of the VCR. This keeps the signals flowing freely. Remove the cables one at a time and clean each connector, as well as its mate on the cable. Let them dry, and re-attach the cable.

10 essential ways to improve your VCR's image quality

4 THE RIGHT CONNECTIONS

If your TV has separate audio/video connectors, (and virtually all contemporary models do) use them instead of the antenna connector to hook up the VCR. The A/V jacks provide a better picture because the signals don't have to be modulated to a TV channel. If your VCR is an S-VHS model, use its S-Video connector to connect the TV, assuming your TV is so equipped. If it's not, it may be time to buy a new TV, because you will only enjoy some but not all the benefits of S-VHS unless you use the S-video connector on both the VCR and TV.

5 INSPECT THOSE CABLES

Check your cables and replace any that look broken, corroded or tarnished. Old, worn or cracked cables can make an otherwise top-notch video system look like it was bought at Goodwill. Use your fingers to tighten loose connectors. Repeat this maintenance every year, more frequently if the cables are exposed to cold or dry air. If you need to replace any, consider pitching in a few more pennies for better quality cables. The cables that come with your VCR and TV are marginal. Higher-quality cables, like those from Monster Cable, XLO and Belden, will transmit signals more clearly and last longer.

When buying cables, don't forget the quality of the connector used on the ends. Gold-plated connectors offer an edge because they don't tarnish. But gilding isn't the only consideration. Make sure the connector is made well: Does it come with built-in strain relief? Does it feel substantial?

6 BOOST YOUR CABLE FEED

Frustrated by your cable feed? There may be ways you can improve your cable TV picture without bothering those nice, overworked people at the local cable company. First, though, inspect the cable that comes into your house. If it's old, have it replaced (most cable companies do this for you, at their expense).

Next, find all the signal splitters used to route the single incoming cable to all the outlets of your house or apartment. If you're not using an outlet, remove the splitter, because it will unnecessarily reduce the strength of the signal. If all the splitters are needed, make sure the connections are clean and tight. If you use a lot of splitters, consider adding your own amplified splitter, available at Radio Shack. The signal is amplified before it's split, so all the outlets receive a better picture.

7 FINE TUNE THE ANTENNA

Still using an outdoor antenna? Then make sure it's giving you all the picture you deserve. On a nice, sunny day (no storms, please!), go outside and inspect the antenna for breakage and corrosion. Replace if it looks worse for wear. Are any of the elements bent or touching one another? If so, straighten them.

If the antenna lacks a rotor for hom-

ing in on the TV broadcast tower, tweak the antenna to make sure you're getting the best possible picture. Have someone stay inside the house to yell "better" and "worse" while he or she watches the TV. A hands-free walkie-talkie makes this chore a snap. While you're on the roof, check the antenna mast. If it's loose, tighten it. You can buy mast hardware and guy wires at Radio Shack and most home improvement centers. A stable mast means better pictures during windy conditions.

Don't forget to inspect the cable leading from the antenna into your house. Replace it if it looks tired and worn. If the cable is the flat, twin-lead type, and the antenna is used to watch VHF channels (2 through 13), consider replacing it with the round coaxial type.

8 REDUCE INTERFERENCE

Whether you know it or not, your TV is affected by other electrical devices in your home, including your cable box and other video components. If you see wavy lines in the picture, you may be able to reduce or eliminate the interference simply by moving your home theater components further apart. For example, placing the cable box a foot or two away from the VCR may make those wavy lines disappear.

9 TWEAK YOUR VCR'S CONTROLS

Most VCRs have few controls for improving picture quality. Still, there are some. If your VCR has a sharpness control, for example, adjust it to see if you can get a better picture. It can help compensate for different room lighting conditions. However, the price for a slightly sharper picture may be a little more grain.

These days, most VCRs have automatic tracking. If the tape doesn't track exactly as recorded, the VCR compensates. However, it may not do so perfectly. Your VCR probably also has a manual override for the automatic tracking control, but it may not be labeled "tracking." On many VCRs, like models from JVC, you need to press the channel up/down buttons while a tape is playing to manually adjust the tracking. If you have a stereo hi-fi VCR, and you hear an annoying popping sound, the tape isn't tracking properly. Try adjusting the channel up/down buttons. If this doesn't work, you can at least rid yourself of the popping by switching the VCR from hi-fi to normal mode.

While you're at it, revisit the manuals that came with your video system's components to see what they recommend in terms of fine-tuning and maintenance. They're almost certain to have some tips that can improve your picture quality.

10 START WITH A GOOD VCR

We've saved the most obvious and potentially most helpful strategy for last: the best way to improve your VCR's picture may be to replace it with a better model. Look for models with enhanced video and audio features. For best picture quality, get a VCR with four or six video heads. Six-head models, like those from Toshiba, offer slightly better recording and playback at EP speed. For premier sound, get a hi-fi stereo VCR. A four-head, hi-fi model costs only about $100 more than a basic, no-frills deck.

Consider also S-VHS. All major VCR makers, including JVC, Panasonic, Mitsubishi, RCA and Sony, offer at least one S-VHS model, and prices begin at only about $150 more than standard VHS decks. Several VCR makers include extra picture improvement features in their S-VHS models. For example, many top-end Sony VCRs come with Adaptive Picture Control (APC), which tailors a recorded video signal to match the capabilities of the tape you're using.

If you follow these tips the tapes you record and play on your VCR will look and sound their best. Your system will last longer, and if something does seem wrong, you'll have a handy checklist to pinpoint the problem. ■

TECH TIP

Pocket protection

Though it seems like simple advice, always put your tapes away in their original plastic cases between uses. This applies especially to 8mm tapes which, because of their small size, get stuffed into lint-filled pockets. This kind of foreign debris gets into the cassette and shows up as dropouts and other unwanted artifacts. A Sony tape expert says that it's common for 8mm users to buttonhole him at trade shows and complain about the number of dropouts they are seeing, and then pull that tape, sans case, out of their pocket. Also, while you're putting it away, take the opportunity to label and mark it.

–Stewart Applegath

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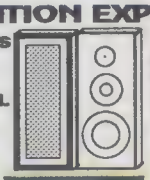

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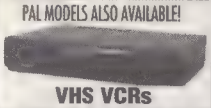

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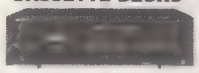

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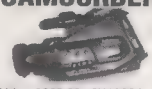

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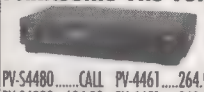

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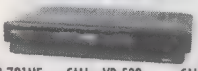

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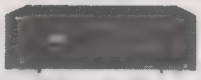

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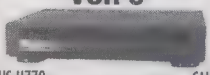

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DAIRIES

continued from page 56

City and Telluride film festivals.

THE LONGEST YARN

Silverlake Life and *Double Blind* are diaries carefully edited into conventional-length works, but at least one other video diarist has chosen to present his life in a lightly-edited, real-time mode. In 1986, James Wagner was a divorced father raising a nine-year-old son in Clintonville, a neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio. Looking for a creative outlet, he took a friend's advice and started keeping a video diary.

Then he took the step that changed his life. Wagner put his diary on television, on a public access channel on Columbus' cable TV system. For more than eight years, until Wagner took a break last summer, cable subscribers have been able to watch the life of James Wagner unfold in monthly hour-long episodes.

The shows can be painfully revealing. In one 1992 episode, shortly after Wagner's second wife moved out of the house, he takes the camcorder on a tour of an empty room. "This is where Janet's desk used to be," narrates Wagner. "The computer was *there*. Bookshelves were *there*. More bookshelves. This is where the phone used to plug in. Then, see there's a futon here that was kind of on a frame that made it like a sofa. And then actually she had taken to staying in here, so it was kind of like a little cell." From behind the camcorder, Wagner's self-deprecating tone indicates he's already decided this is a ridiculous exercise. "Um, I don't know if this is supposed to be a metaphor for something, or what...Oh well. What is it they say? Better to have loved and to have lost." Then he starts singing, "I'm a loser. I'm a loser." As he sings, he starts to dance, and we see his shadow flitting on the wall, holding the camcorder.

Most of the time, Wagner's life is low-key. He folds the laundry, washes the dishes and discusses the affairs of the day. Once he has picked a situation to record, Wagner shoots long, uninterrupted takes, defiantly refusing to edit the slow parts. So when Wagner visits his parents in Florida, viewers get to watch seven minutes of Wagner's point of view from the back of a car. Where they're going, like so many details in *Clintonville Confidential*, is never explained.

In the front passenger seat, his mother leafs through a real-estate flyer and reads to his father every minute or so. Their only exchange goes like this:

"Hey dad?"

"Yeah."

"Could you roll the windows up for me?"

"Right away?"

"Yeah."

Later, Wagner's parents drive by a gas station and notice that the price of gas has risen three cents to $1.04.

"That's a big jump," says dad.

"Bang," agrees mom. "Big jump."

Is this stuff worth putting on television? "I just think life is very engaging," says Wagner. He thinks of an example. "If somebody wants to turn the channel and watch a razor commercial or some enormous person with a helmet and armor, let 'em."

The growth in video diaries has convinced at least one person that they deserve a place in the sun. Ellen Schneider, co-executive producer of the PBS series *P.O.V.*, is trying to develop a TV series that would showcase diaries. Having screened 500 documentaries a year for *P.O.V.*, Schneider says she's seen a rise in

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first-person video. "There are human dramas going on all around the country that are being captured by talented storytellers," says Schneider. "If you were able to pull the right kind of resources and talent together, you could form a new kind of television drama that was authentic, intimate, real and very important."

Schneider is aware that not all video diaries are interesting to watch. "It's hard to tell a good story," she admits. Giving someone a camcorder and asking him or her to make a great television program, she says, "is like giving someone a word processor and saying, 'Go out and write a novel.'" But given the right person, "you can have some groundbreaking possibilities." n

TECH TIPS

Early birds

If you shoot special-occasion videos, it's good policy to visit the place where the event will take place beforehand. Shoot some footage of the exterior and interior. Not only will this familiarize you with where you're supposed to be on the big day, it'll provide you with some establishing shots and cutaways. You can edit these into the final video for variety, rather than having to worry about getting them all while the main event is taking place.

Low-cost lighting

An inexpensive lighting kit can be made from three of the metal scoop lamps with clamps that still photographers use for photofloods. They're available at any hardware store and camera stores sell the photofloods. The clamps allow you to mount the lamps virtually anywhere, and your total cost for three video lights will be around $30.

Double dub

Here's how to make a series of dubs of the same tape and save some time: If you have two VCRs in addition to the deck you're playing from, run an extra set of dubbing cables from the audio/video outputs of the first VCR you're recording to into the A/V inputs of the second. The image quality loss from the first record deck to the second is barely noticeable, and you'll be able to make two dubs at once.

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TAPES & DISCS

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FEATURE FILMS

The Shadow

1994. Alec Baldwin, Penelope Ann Miller, John Lone; dir. Russell Mulcahy. Surround, cc. (PG-13) 112 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $34.98. MCA/Universal.

This is the blockbuster that wasn't, even though *The Shadow* possesses all the necessary elements for box-office success. This breezy adaptation of the vintage radio serial boasts a dashing hero in Lamont Cranston (Baldwin), the intrepid crime-fighter with the ability to become invisible by clouding men's minds. His ruthless foe (Lone), a descendant of Genghis Khan, possesses the same powers, and intends to bring the world to its knees.

There are dazzling art deco sets that capture the swanky side of '30s New York, lively special effects, and a solid supporting cast, including Penelope Ann Miller as the sexy romantic interest, Ian McKellen, as a bumbling scientist, Peter Boyle as Cranston's loyal aide, Jonathan Winters as a confused police chief and Tim Curry as an evil scientist. It all adds up to a fizzy, refreshing cocktail.

Perhaps moviegoers overdosed on all the derring-do, after the exploits of Batman and Dick Tracy. If so, too bad, because the Shadow is more entertaining than either. Radiating an easy charisma, Baldwin seems born to the role of the suave good guy with a dark side, while Lone has a whale of a time glaring wickedly at mortals foolish enough to oppose him. Corny in the best possible way, *The Shadow* transcends camp to make pulp adventure fun again.

—Jon Young

Shadow Play: Alec "The Shadow" Baldwin jousts with his police-chief uncle, Jonathan Winters.

Fear of a Black Hat

1994. Rusty Cundieff, Larry B. Scott; dir. Cundieff. Surround, cc. (R) 87 min. priced for rental. LD $39.98. FoxVideo.

As vital, and crude, as the rap music it spoofs, *Fear of a Black Hat* is the hip-hop cousin of *This Is Spinal Tap*. Writer /director and star Rusty Cundieff's affectionate, utterly disrespectful look at this controversial genre chronicles the progress of NWH (a.k.a. Niggers with Hats) as they claw their way to the top, leaving behind a trail of dead white managers and offended women. With a savvy grasp of show-business absurdity, he knows that in one sense the joke's on them: Ice Cold (Cundieff), Tasty-Taste (Scott) and DJ Tone-Def (Mark Christopher Law-rence) are little more than thuggish buffoons who blindly accept gangster rap's cliched misogyny and gun-crazed brutality. On the other hand, they've become rich championing stupidity, so who are the real fools?

Cundieff specializes in witty music-video parodies of Public Enemy, Digital Underground, LL Cool J, PM Dawn, and, of course, NWA. However, his mocking glee can't hide the film's flaws. Most segments run too long, yet don't fully exploit the comic potential of the material. (A look at Tasty-Taste's enormous firearms collection is a hilarious exception.) Still, anyone who dismantles pop culture with such engaging flair deserves an unqualified thumbs-up.

–JY

White

1994. Zbigniew Zamachowski, Julie Delpy; dir. Krzysztof Kieslowski. Stereo, subtitled. (R) 92 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $39.99. Miramax.

White is the second film in Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Three Colors" trilogy. The first, *Blue* was a drama of liberation. *White*, symbolizing equality, is a mordant black comedy, *Topaz* updated for the new Europe.

Karol (Zamachowski), a Polish

White Nights: Delpy and Zamachowski.

hairdresser, is first seen in dire straits in Paris. His French wife Dominique (Delpy) not only divorces him–he couldn't function in bed after the wedding but leaves him broke and humiliated. When he hits bottom, he's back in Warsaw and ready to change his life. After a few shady deals, Karol becomes a self-confident tycoon, whose true goal is an elaborate revenge against Dominique.

On a personal level, *White* is about power and how people need to have and use it, even against their best interests. On a broader level, the themes of the trilogy begin to emerge as we see that the promise of European economic unity will be fulfilled not with a common currency, but in the way people and nations adapt to new realities.

White is understated, nicely detailed and consistent in tone. It should prove satisfying to all who enjoy European films. **–Sol Louis Siegel**

True Lies

1994. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jamie Lee Curtis, Tom Arnold; dir. James Cameron. Surround, cc. (R) 114 min. priced for rental. LD letterboxed $49.98. FoxVideo.

The latest monstrously expensive Arnold Schwarzenegger movie, *True Lies*, is a tribute to overspending and military hardware. God help us if director James Cameron ever gets what would seem to be his dream job, head of purchasing at the Pentagon. Schwarzenegger plays Harry Trasker, a secret agent with a double life. As a special government agent, he keeps the world safe from nuclear terrorism. At home and in the eyes of his wife Helen (Curtis), he's a dull computer salesman. With its elaborate action scenes diminished on video and stripped on my system of the jaw-rattling sound that beat theatrical audiences into submission, *True Lies* becomes an uncomfortably mean-spirited excuse for light entertainment. Everything revolves around Harry's machismo. When he discovers Helen is on the verge of an affair, he counters by psychologically torturing her and humiliating his would-be rival. Once she finds out about Harry's real life, Helen becomes his accomplice in derring-do. Toss in some nasty racial stereotypes and you've got a movie with more ills than thrills. The eroticized shot of Harry and Helen kissing in the flash of a nuclear explosion is as reprehensible an image as I've ever seen in a movie. **—M. Faust**

Nuclear Family: Schwarzenegger and Curtis.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

ken korman

Even those of us who don't consider ourselves action movie fans fell hard for last summer's irresistible **Speed** (FoxVideo: VHS, $19.95; laserdisc $29.95). And with good reason. *Speed* is the kind of joyous, uncluttered thrill ride Hollywood would gladly serve up two or three times a month if it could only figure out how to bottle the magic. The reality is that two or three times a year is way out of reach. Now on a THX quality-approved laserdisc, *Speed* qualifies as a home theater classic.

Speed

For those who missed it, *Speed*'s plot amounts to little more than a two-hour chase. A madman places a bomb on a Los Angeles city bus in order to exact ransom for the passengers, but also to toy with a couple of L.A.P.D. bomb experts who thwarted a similar effort at the start of the film. The twist is that the bomb goes off if the bus slows below 50 miles per hour, despite the typical snail's pace of L.A. freeway traffic.

First-time director Jan DeBont, who has served as cinematographer for action classics like *Die Hard*, makes it all look easy. The movie is amazingly streamlined, without a wasted scene or shot. The truth about Keanu Reeves is that he's terrific in the role of the hero, no matter what the world says about his acting abilities. Then there's Dennis Hopper as the mad bomber. You just can't take your eyes off him, even though you've seen this act a thousand times before in everything from *Apocalypse Now* to those audacious improvised Nike commercials.

The laserdisc is everything fans hoped for: The image is wide, wide, wide at the original aspect ratio 2.35:1, which is just about the shape of a hurtling bus. And the sound will have you off the couch, tweaking your audio system as never before. Kudos to Fox for the $30 pricetag. Cut to the chase, indeed. ■

School Of Hard Knocks: Paolo Viliagio demonstrates geometry to class in *Ciao Professore!*

Ciao Professore!

1994. Paolo Viliagio; dir. Lina Wertmuller. Surround, subtitled. (R) 91 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $39.99. Miramax.

As plots go, the idea of sending a teacher from a fairly well-off background to deal with the students of an impoverished area (in this case, Southern Italy) is not particularly original. It has turned up in plenty of films including *Blackboard Jungle*, *The Principal* and another Italian film, *Forever Mary*. What sets *Ciao Professore!* apart is that the foul-mouthed hoodlums educating the teacher are only eight years old, turning a familiar premise on its head.

Though concerned with the fate of kids living in the crushing poverty of an earthquake-shattered town run by the Mafia, *Professore!* is never preachy or depressing. The kids still view life through young eyes, even though they live as adults, with real jobs and responsibilities for babies and sick or drunken adults. The scenario leads to a new perspective on the adult world, which we share with the kids. With their ability to adapt and survive against overwhelming odds, the kids make wonderful characters, and keep the film optimistic. We could all learn something from their vulgar wisdom and simple logic

–Josef Krebs

LASERDISCS

South Pacific

1958. Rossano Brazzi, Mitzi Gaynor, John Kerr, Ray Walston; dir. Joshua Logan. Stereo, letterboxed. (NR) 157 min. CLV 3 sides $59.98. FoxVideo.

It would have to be *some* enchanted evening before I'd pay $60 for this disc. And that's sad, because thanks to the triple whammy of Technicolor, the Todd-AO widescreen film format and THX approval, *South Pacific* looks and sounds absolutely breathtaking. But thanks to Joshua Logan (*Camelot*), who directed this Rodgers and Hammerstein classic with the subtlety of Anna Nicole Smith in a sarong, it's also interminable.

The story tracks two romances—naive nurse Nellie Forbush and French planter Emile de Becque (Gaynor and Brazzi), and Lt. Joe Cable and native girl Liat (Kerr and France Nuyen)—on a military outpost in the South Pacific, as in James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*. Between the twin shadows of prejudice and the Japanese, the relationships falter. But it's only a matter of a few tunes before the uplifting ending.

I had fond memories of this triple Oscar nominee, but now its "dramatic" color filters and yearbook-caliber fuzzy-edged close-ups wear thin before the first chorus of "Bali H'ai." For fans of the music, songs such as "There Is Nothing Like a Dame" and "Younger Than Springtime" don't disappoint, which leads me to recommend buying the soundtrack, not this overblown, overwrought film.

–April P. Bernard

Hail the Conquering Hero/The Great Moment

1944. Eddie Bracken, Joel McCrea, William Demarest; dir. Preston Sturges. Digital mono. (NR) 101 min./83 min. CLV 4 sides $59.98. MCA/Universal.

Despite a career that peaked and faded in four years, Preston Sturges was one of Hollywood's comic masters, a creator of films that merged Frank Capra Americana with Billy Wilder cynicism. *Hail the Conquering Hero* is his most purely likeable movie. Certainly no one else could have gotten away with a film at the height of World War II that satirized hero-worship. Too embarrassed to return home after he is discharged for asthma, would-be Marine Woodrow Truesmith (Bracken) is helped out by a group of sympathetic Marines he meets in a bar. They loan him a uniform, escort him home and figure no one will ever be the wiser.

Guess again. Woodrow's home town lays out a hero's welcome to end all, and

War Relief: *Hero's* Bracken and Demarest.

the more he tries to downplay his "exploits" the more the town cheers. Sturges' repertory company of character actors is in top form, tossing off snappy dialog with precision timing. And the hapless Bracken's expressions as he drowns in the milk of human kindness are priceless.

The Great Moment is less typical. It's a corny, entertaining mix of comedy and drama starring Joel McCrea as the 19th-century dentist who discovered ether. While the film is not without pleasures, Sturges fans are advised to approach it with minimal expectations. **–MF**

It Came From Beneath the Sea/20 Million Miles to Earth

1955/1957. Kenneth Tobey, Donald Curtis/William Hopper, Frank Puglia; dir. Robert Gordon. Digital mono. (NR) 80 min./82 min. $59.95. Columbia TriStar.

After the technical virtuosity of *Jurassic Park* and *Forrest Gump*, revisiting the old-fashioned special effects of Ray Harryhausen on laserdisc seems a risky proposition. For all his brilliance at creating illusions, this master craftsman had neither the budget nor the tools available to his successors. Happily, this two-disc package finds the charm of his "primitive" trickery undiminished, at least in one of these films. Hampered by stock footage, dull dialog, and terrible acting, *It Came from Beneath the Sea* should have been left in the vaults. Harryhausen's financial resources were severely limited, and it shows. Even the climactic shots of the giant octopus destroying the Golden Gate Bridge are too little, too late.

On the other hand, *20 Million Miles to Earth* still emits sparks. Harry-hausen's nasty lizard from Venus rampages through Rome with thrilling abandon, his destructive tantrums rendered more vivid by the disc's high resolution. William Hopper (of *Perry Mason* fame) strikes all the right poses as the military officer confronting the peril, while a tight script keeps the proceedings moving. *20 Million Miles* works because cool visuals aren't the whole show. It's a well-told story, and that never goes out of style, whatever the state of the art. **–JY**

Escape From New York

1981. Kurt Russell, Lee Van Cleef, Ernest Borgnine, Donald Pleasence; dir. John Carpenter. Digital surround, letterboxed, cc. (R) 99 min. plus supplement. CLV 2 sides $49.99. New Line/Image Entertainment.

Let's not confuse this Saturday matinee fare with any breakthrough action movies in the *Terminator* vein. John Carpenter's bleak vision of Manhattan as a maximum-security island prison is a concept almost as hilarious as it is daring. As hardball convict Snake, Kurt Russell must venture into Manhattan to retrieve an abducted President.

Escape recently received a minor "director's cut" treatment on tape by New Line, using a very good widescreen transfer and adding a 10-minute interview with Carpenter on the making of the film, all of which is included on this disc. Another lure is some new footage: The original opening, which had Snake robbing a bank and then fleeing in a transcontinental subway, where police capture him has been included. But these scenes are not actually added back into the film; they are merely glimpsed in snippets during Carpenter's talk, a fact the tape and disc jackets fail to make clear.

But the disc has an outstanding saving grace: The analog track presents a running commentary by Carpenter and Russell, who clearly have a ball reliving their youthful filmmaking days. They kid each other about the shooting difficulties, the low-budget constraints, the costumes, Russell's weight and Adrienne Barbeau's sex appeal. Yes, the chit-chat outweighs the insights, but this is a popcorn movie. Relax and enjoy. **—Andy Wickstrom**

Casino Royale

1967. Peter Sellers, Ursula Andress, David Niven, Orson Welles, Woody Allen; dir. John Huston, Ken Hughes, Val Guest,

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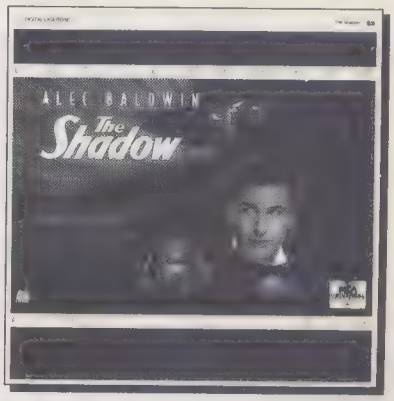

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Robert Parrish, Joe McGrath. Digital mono, letterboxed. (NR) 131 min. CAV side 3 $39.95. Columbia Tristar.

At the height of Bondmania in the '60s, megabuck producer Charles K. Feldman obtained the rights to *Casino Royale*, one of the few Ian Fleming 007 novels not acquired by Bondmeisters Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman. Unable to sign Sean Connery as Bond, Feldman decided to reshape the story into a free-wheeling, nearly plotless spoof of spy movies in general and Bond in particular.

The result, handsomely presented here in its original widescreen 2.35:1 aspect ratio, is an overcooked, incomprehensible mess. It features David Niven as a fastidious, celibate 007, Orson Welles as a villain who does Las Vegas magic tricks, Peter Sellers as a shy card player, and Woody Allen as a nebbishy bad guy. Five directors and countless writers handled *Royale*, giving it the stitched together quality of a badly-made quilt.

The movie has a rousing score by Burt Bacharach and good gags by Allen, but its other laughs come in spurts. There's a clever sequence parodying the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and some appropriately absurd dialog. In trying to out-Bond Bond, however, Feldman made everything bigger, broader and stupider. In a word, Thunderblah.

–Tom Soter

INTERACTIVE

Cinema Volta

1994, CD-ROM for Macintosh. $49.95, Voyager.

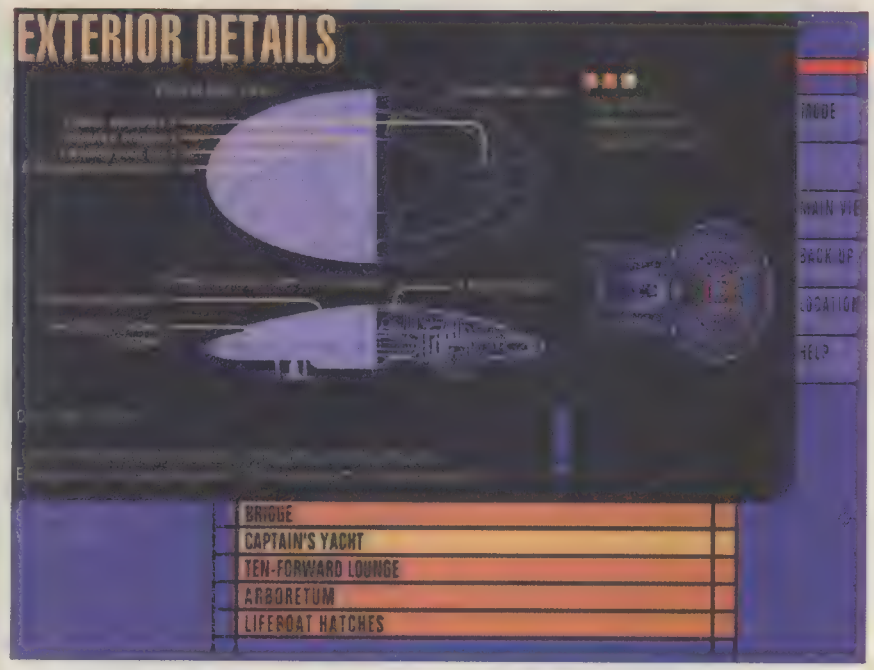
In 1909, with the help of some Italian investors, James Joyce opened a movie theater in Dublin. Called Cinema Volta in honor of the man who invented the battery, the theater was intended as a showcase for the ideas of the Italian Futurists, who believed that art could depict the power of the mechanical age.

Though 85 years after the fact, this disc is squarely in the tradition of those optimistic thinkers. Creator James Petrillo, who directs the Electronic Media Art program at California State University at Hayward, has fashioned a work of digital performance art that pays tribute to the past while staying true to its Futurist inspiration.

The disc is a series of stream-of-consciousness ruminations on everything from Frankenstein's monster to Alexander Graham Bell's strange habit of carrying a cadaver's ear in his pocket. The stories, which can be narrated at the user's option, are punctuated with videos, animations and classic photos. By the end of the program, they blend together in a way that suggests a midpoint between documentary and surrealism.

CD-ROM does indeed offer outstanding new possibilities for artistic expression. Here's a title that takes those possibilities to heart. Somewhere, James Joyce is smiling

–Ron Goldberg



Beamed Aboard: The Star Trek manual, guided tours with digitized video.

Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Technical Manual

1994. CD-ROM for Windows and Macintosh. $69.95, Simon & Schuster.

I have to admit that the *Star Trek* phenomenon has always puzzled me. I was indifferent to the original show and although the new series seems more intelligent, it hasn't hooked me. Clearly, I'm not the ideal audience for this disc. But the same can't be said for the half-million souls who bought book-style copies of the new Enterprise's technical manual. If you're among them, or one of the millions of others who enjoys *Next Generation*, you're going to love this disc, which literally puts you on board for a day with Starfleet command.

The walkthrough is conducted by genuine voices from the show, and features a new 3-D technology from Apple called QuickTime VR. This allows smooth 360-degree pans and zooms, controlled by the viewer, around the disc's beautifully rendered graphics. Click on the various consoles, control panels and gadgets and you can learn all about the technologies, philosophies and personal concerns that drive the

starship's crew.

Expertly designed from both technical and marketing standpoints, this disc is bound to be a blockbuster. That would make *Star Trek* a hit in four different mediums. Guess I'd better get with the program. **–RG**

Shock Wave

1994. 3DO disc, pr. Stewart Bonn. Dolby Surround. $69.95. Electronic Arts.

Where would videogames be without Electronic Arts? From standard-setting sports titles like *John Madden Football* and *FIFA Soccer* to this hot 3DO exclusive, the company's best work puts most competitors to shame. Anyone who can't get excited about an original like *Shock Wave* should give up gaming altogether.

Shock Wave relies on a time-honored premise: Alien spaceships have invaded earth, quickly destroying mankind's woefully inadequate armed forces. Except, of course, for one elite squadron of pilots flying sophisticated, experimental aircraft. As the squad's rookie, you must use your wits and considerable firepower to make your way through 10 levels of combat. Full-screen video segments provide the necessary background for *Shock Wave*'s combination flight/combat simulator, which is by far the most realistic I've seen. It delivers full 360-degree movement with matching Dolby Surround sound, and 3-D graphics that will make you forget it's only a game.

Like all the best games, *Shock Wave* is easy to play and difficult to master. But getting there is at least half the fun. Make no mistake: Interactive software is improving at an alarming rate.

–Ken Korman

Fire When Ready. *Shock Wave*, 10 levels of combat and a rookie at the controls

SPECIAL INTEREST

Blast 'Em

1993. Victor Malafronte; dir. Joseph Blasioli, Egidio Coccimiglio. Mono. 103 min. priced for rental. Academy.

Blast 'Em exposes the subculture of the media machine: the aggressive, take-no-prisoners pack photographers who snatch candid photos of Madonna jogging, and Paul Newman getting into a limo. In a society built around fame, pictures like these are the brick and mortar.

For an inside look at the business, this lively documentary follows one photographer, Victor Malafronte. In search of celebrities, Malafronte and his fellow photographers live by one rule: Get the shot. Second thoughts about the feelings of their subjects are unwelcome distractions, about as relevant as vegetarianism is to sharks. Thus, we see a giddy photographer recall the triumph of getting the only shot of a sick, reclusive Greta Garbo entering a hospital. As a friend told him a few days later, "Albert, you're the luckiest guy: Garbo died."

Blast 'Em vividly captures the twisted feelings many Americans, not just paparazzi, have for celebrities. We love them when we think they speak to us. But when we sense rejection, we turn ugly. In the movie's most notorious scene, Malafronte tries to get the attention of Christie Brinkley as she walks into a building: "Christie—legitimate press, please. Can we have a few pictures?" When she ignores him, he yells, "Thanks a lot, you...." For the rest of his remark, you'll have to rent the tape.

—George Mannes

The Compleat Beatles

1994. The Beatles, Brian Epstein, George Martin; dir. Patrick Montgomery. Mono. (NR) 120 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $34.98. MGM/UA.

There's something charming about a 1994 reissue of 1982's The *Compleat Beatles* with "New Remastered Edition" emblazoned across its jacket, as if to evoke the sonic sloganeering Capitol used to plaster on its American Beatle albums to distract you from their sonic weirdness. In the case of this home-video artifact, however, a more realistic label might have read "Digitally Enhanced to Simulate Significance."

The Compleat Beatles is by no means worthless. Rife with snippets compiled by noted Beatle historian Ron Furmanek, the program offers strong coverage of the group's early years and a lucid overview of the early '60s Mersey scene via vintage interviews with Gerry Marsden, Allan "The Man Who Gave The Beatles Away" Williams and Cavern Club d.j. Bob Wooler. Where *The Compleat Beatles* comes up short is the music itself. Though the package implies it has more than 50 classic titles, most are represented by barely a chorus, and often serve as mere background to endless photo montages and Malcolm McDowell's dour voiceover.

In 1982, *The Compleat Beatles* comprised the virtual sum of legal product available on the video market. But much classic Beatle-vid has since become available, and with the Fabs' own authorized "Anthology" finally in production, *The Compleat Beatles* may already be obsolete. **—John Walker**

KIDVID

Mrs. Piggle Wiggle

1994. Jean Stapleton. Stereo, cc. (NR) 57 min. $12.98 per two-episode cassette. MCA/Universal.

Shelley Duvall has created her own cottage industry by turning kid stories into original videos, staffed by her hip and talented film and television friends. After doing tall tales, fairy tale faves and bedtime stories, she's now aimed her A-list rolodex at a live-action adaptation of Betty MacDonald's books, which deal with a sweet matron who cures children of nasty habits.

As a parent, initially unfamiliar with the stories, I found the series charming, even if it sometimes tries too hard to be brightly punny in a *Pee-Wee's Playhouse* sort of way. But if you think adults take umbrage at loose adaptations of their favorite books, watch out when you mess with a child's. Scanning a few Mac Donald stories myself, I can see that many liberties were taken and some faithful readers may object.

Video Originals: Shelley Duvall, adapting a Wiggle.

"Did they even *read* the books?" my nine-year-old case-in-point shrieked. "The town is supposed to be pretty normal, and Mrs. Piggle Wiggle is supposed to be an old woman with a trunk full of cures, not a tree full of magic hats. All the houses in the video look phony–foam and cardboard. And her husband's supposed to be dead!"

Do *you* want to argue with such a critic? **–Marianne Meyer**

A Troll in Central Park

1994. Anim. Voices of Dom DeLuise, Cloris Leachman, Charles Nelson Reilly. Stereo. (G) 1976 min. $19.98. Warner.

Name the great figures of quality children's entertainment. Walt Disney. Jim Henson. Don Bluth? Not so fast. Despite his work on *The Land Before Time*, *All Dogs Go to Heaven* and *An American Tale*, Bluth is still a second-tier animator whose work lacks the quality to make it an automatic gotta-get.

Troll Town: Dom Deluise at large in Central Park

So far, his visual style has just one look–round and busy. You'd be hard pressed to tell the difference between frames from any two of his films. Likewise, his characters tend to be "types," a sameness reinforced by repetitious use of voiceover performers. Here we have a grumpy big brother, voiced by Phillip Glasser, the former Fievel the mouse, and a sweet, misunderstood troll, played by Dom Deluise.

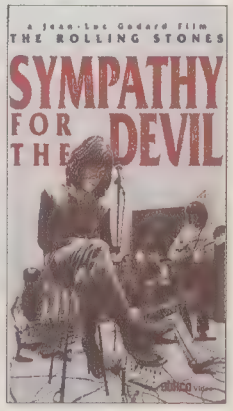
Formula is nothing new in kids' films, but cookie cutters work overtime here. Two neglected kids run off for an adventure in Central Park and meet –a troll whose (literal) green thumb makes instant flowers and attracts the wrath of the mean queen from his exiled homeland. The plot proceeds breathlessly, a confusing maze of chases and symbolic flights of fantasy. Pat phrases like "believe in your dreams" are repeated ad nauseam while chipper, forgettable songs lengthen the proceedings. It's not bad for your kids, but it'll send parents racing for less sugary fare. **–MM**

CLASSICS

Sympathy for the Devil

1970. The Rolling Stones; dir. Jean-Luc Godard. Mono. (NR) 101 min. $29.95. LD $39.95. ABKCO.

The aim of *Sympathy For The Devil* was more evident when it was originally released under the title *One Plus One*. Director Jean-Luc Godard shot footage of the Rolling Stones working through the arrangement of the (now) title song, watching unemotionally as the musicians progressed the rhythm from a samba-dirge to the kinetic Afro-pop of its final form. Godard used this metaphor of progress to reinforce his own political agenda, which in the late '60s was Marxism as adapted by the Black Power movment.



Each time the Stones reached a rhythmic crossroads in the studio, Godard cut away to a tedious installment of guerilla theater in which disgruntled students and quasi-Black Panthers read revolutionary tracts out loud and searched for meaning by acting out whitey's worst fanstasies. The result is an odd time-capsule that captures the Stones at their creative peak, while exposing the roots of their creative downfall as trendy radical chic-lettes.

As a Marxist conceit, *Sympathy For The Devil* would never have survived the Stone's rise to megastardom. What it offers is a fascinating glimpse of a historic recording session in which the original line-up is portrayed as a single organism, not a bunch of extras crowding into the frame with Mick Jagger. **—John Walker**

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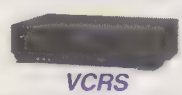

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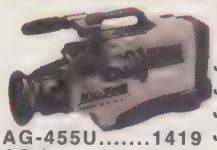

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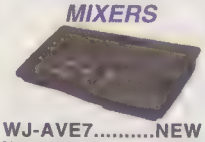

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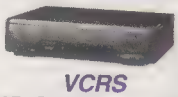

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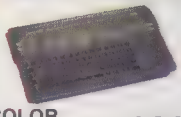

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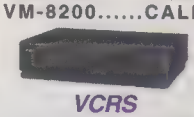

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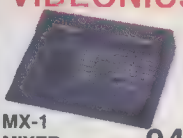

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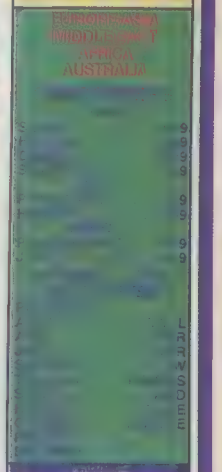

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HIGHLIGHTS

Autumn Sonata
1978. Ingrid Bergman, Liv Ullman, Halvar Bjork, Gunnar Bjornstrand; ph. Sven Nykvist, dir. Ingmar Bergman. Finally, the Swedish subtitled version of the award-winning film comes to video. Bergman's film explores the rivalry and guilt that strains the bond between a mother and daughter when both are longing for intimacy. Mono, subtitled. (NR) 92 min. VHS only, $39.95. Public Media.

Boogerman
1995. Sega Genesis. 30 frames per second, 24-megabyte cartoon animation with 20 levels, including fart-level humor. Boogerman, real identity Snotty Ragsdale, saves the world from ecological disaster armed with only boogers, belches, loogies and flatulance. $59.99. Interplay Productions.

Dust: A Tale of the Wired West
1995. Mac and Windows CD-ROMs. Walk carefully through 3-D streets, alleys and building interiors and carry a big gun 'cause this cyber-town is full of bank robbers and desperados. There ain't no injuns, but you do get to help a Native American recover his tribe's heritage, and you can converse with 30 interactive characters in this action-filled, problem-solving, ever-changing narrative of the West. $69.95. Cyberflix.

The Enemy Within
1994. Forest Whitaker, Jason Robards, Sam Waterston; dir. Johnathan Darby. General disagrees with the President's proposed military budget and prepares to protest the cuts by launching a military coup. Now if only the teachers...Stereo. (NR) 86 min. VHS priced for rental. HBO.

Killer's Release: Juliette Lewis in *Natural Born Killers*

Indiana Jones' Greatest Adventures
1994. Super NES. Indy movie trilogy combined into one 28-level action-intensive survival game, with dangerous situations and locales from *Raiders, Temple* and *Last Crusade*, created by LucasArts. $$59.99. JVC.

The Mask
1994. Jim Carrey, Milo, Richard Jeni; dir. Chuck Russell. Lots of hype and a low price won't make this special-effects explosion look like *Snow White*, but be prepared if this cartoony caper isn't your style. Carrey's signed up for the sequel, and a children's series is on the way. Surround. (PG-13) 101 min. VHS $19.98. THX LD $39.99 (from Image). New Line.

Natural Born Killers
1994. Juliette Lewis, Woody Harrelson, Robert Downey Jr., Tommy Lee Jones; dir. Oliver Stone. Animation, video, black-and-white footage, meets a multi-format, multi-filmstock, multi-narrative style. Never was cinema more multimedia, or Stone more full of life (it even has a sense of humor!) than in this serial-killing saga. But maybe that's the influence of firecracker Quentin Tarantino who came up with the story. Shame it's pan-and-scan, but a widescreen laserdisc (LD $39.98) follows this winter. Surround. (R) 119 min. VHS priced for rental. Warner.

Sword of Honor
1994. Steven Vincent Leigh, Sophia Crawford; dir. Robert Tiffe. Cop sets out to avenge his partner's mysterious...well who cares about the plot. Leigh, a mix of Bruce Lee, Jean Claude Van Damme and Marky Mark has the fast fists and hard bod it takes to be the next big martial arts star. Mono. (R) 95 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $39.99 (from Image). PM.

Super Return of the Jedi
1994. Super NES. The final Nintendo chapter in the LucasArts *Star Wars* Trilogy. Chose one of five characters and, from the Jabba's Palace to the forest of Endor, you'll fight the bad guys in a 16-MB galaxy through 19 levels of gameplay (including a trench run on the Death Star!) With the John Williams soundtrack. May the force be with you. $59.99. JVC.

Trial By Jury
1994. Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, Armand Assante, Gabriel Byrne, William Hurt; dir. Heywood Gould. Thriller about none-too-helpless sexy female juror menaced by the mob to get the acquital of their boss. The exceptional leading men play the sexy accused killer, the sexy D.A. and the sexy corrupt cop. Letterboxed laserdisc ($34.98) later this Winter. Surround. (R) 107 min. VHS priced for rental. Warner.

Wolf
1994. Jack Nicholson, Michelle Pfeiffer, Christopher Plummer, James Spader; dir. Mike Nichols. Bookish book editor goes beastly, turns on boss and bites the hand that feeds him. A howl. Surround. (R) 125 min. VHS priced for rental. LD $39.95. Columbia TriStar.

continued on page 86

By Josef Krebs

Labels For Less

In celebration of Black History Month, a wide range of African-American made and themed movies are being released at low prices, including *Nothing But a Man* at $19.95 from New Video; *Poetic Justice*, *House Party 3*, *Zebrahead*, *One False Move* and *Mississippi Masala* at $19.95 each; and *Boyz N the Hood*, *Hangin' With the Home Boys*, *To Sleep With Anger*, *Heaven is a Playground*, *Amos N Andrew* and *Mo' Money* at $14.95 each, all from Columbia TriStar.

It's also Valentine's Day this month and the annual bouquet of love and marriage videos will also be coming at you: *Memories of a Marriage*, *Overseas* and *Cross My Heart* at $19.98 each from Fox Lorber; *So I Married an Axe Murderer* and *Hexed* at $19.95 each; and *Return to the Blue Lagoon*, *Late For Dinner*, *Bugsy*, *Three of Hearts*, *The Age of Innocence*–all from Columbia TriStar–and *The Untamed Heart* and *The Goodbye Girl* from MGM/UA, all at $14.95 each. Even Disney's in on the celebrations with *Winnie the Pooh Un-Valentine's Day* and *Disney Love Tales* at $12.99 each. —JK

Mississippi Masala

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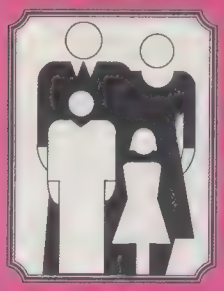

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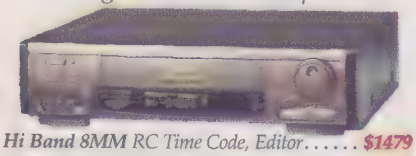

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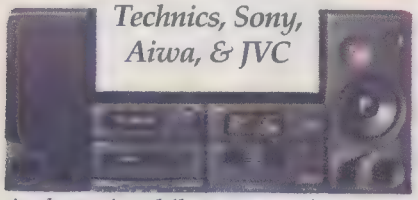

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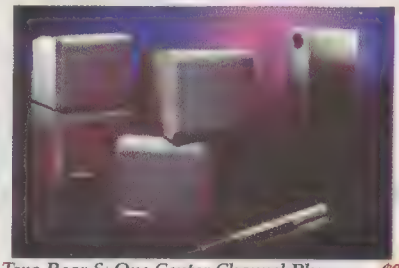

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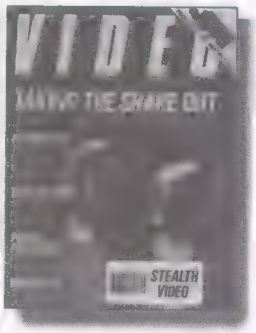

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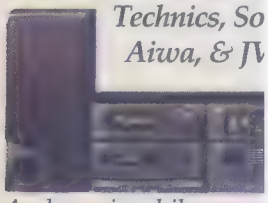

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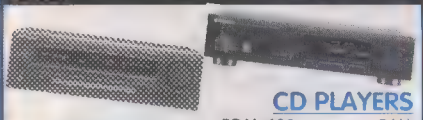

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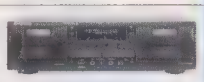

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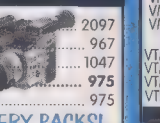

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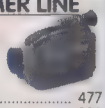

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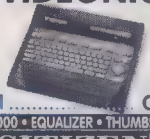

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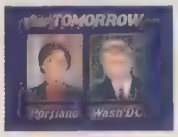

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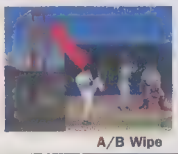
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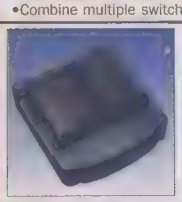

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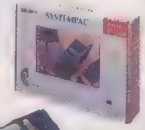

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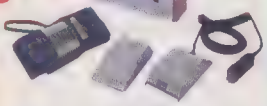

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GIANT STRIDES

continued from page 48

set put out a strong 28 fLs and was very uniform with a color temperature around 11,000. The set's contrast was being moderately overdriven, and the excellence of its power supply showed again on the needle pulse pattern. Resolution was among the best, measuring 410 lines horizontal and 500 vertical.

We judged the Pioneer to have a superior internal line amplifier with a moderate peak at 1 MHz on the multiburst pattern, and this superb detail was evident. The chrominance to luminance delay was problematic; a black leading edge on test patterns showed the timing to be only slightly off. Among the other sets, only the Zenith also displayed this problem, and it was slight. Convergence was good, though the image was a tad underscanned. This set was the only one with no internal reflections. Post-calibration measurements showed a very linear set: it hit 6,500 degrees at high signal output levels with an excellent 27.8 fLs of brightness.

The remote is simple, easy to use and lighted. The set includes a one-tuner PIP with a nine-image strobe and three cinema modes to help you enjoy the width. There is no surround-sound decoder, but the stereo sound is good.

The Pro-97 was the class of the field. It does more things better than any of the other sets tested. It has a good screen, an excellent power supply and linearity, low noise and superb detail. Our panelists agreed this was the most pleasing picture, eyes seemed drawn toward it.

SONY KP-53XBR35

This Sony was the bluest out of the box, its moody look due in part to a non-removeable contrast screen. Its gray scale delineation was excellent, the equal of the Pioneer. FootLamberts measured a low 11.9, which we attributed to the contrast screen. Color temperature was a very even 8,400 degrees from side to side. The contrast proved to be set too high, as indicated by the needle pulse pattern. Adjustment revealed an adequate power supply. Resolution was the equal of the Pioneer at 410 lines horizontal and 500 vertical.

This set really shined on the multiburst pattern, delivering great detail with no significant peaks. We rate its line amplifier as the best of the bunch. Looking at convergence, both sizing and linearity were very good. The low level gray was read off the meter at over 16,000 degrees, and was shifted toward blue. Internal reflections were mild. After calibration, made easier by drive controls accessed through the remote, the set was stable and uniform at 6,500 degrees at both low and high output levels. But we were getting a disappointing 8.6 fLs of brightness at this point.

The remote is well designed, the surround-sound decoding is good and the speaker system is good. But for the contrast screen, which also picks up room reflections if lights are on, this set could have nearly equalled the Pioneer in terms of picture excellence, and at a considerably lower cost. As it is, it rates high in all categories except brightness and power supply.

TOSHIBA TP55D80

At 55-inches this set produces a huge picture. Just out of the box, it displayed a slight green shading from left to right. Its corners appeared dimmer than the center, and hot-spotting was evident. These conditions could all derive from the screen itself. Looking at the gray scale bars on a pulse pattern, initial delineation was poor. The set was putting out a very high 31 fLs of measured brightness. The color temperature was 8,400 degrees and consistent from side to side. The brightness (black level) was set high. The needle pulse pattern on the test disc showed a poorly-controlled power supply that was being radically overdriven and was not handling the white level of the tubes. The two lines could not be straightened with constrast adjustments.

Resolution measured on the low side, with 390 horizontal lines and 380 vertical. Frequency response on the multiburst pattern showed a moderate peak in the middle that could create some ringing (white edges on objects), but also fairly good detail. Convergence was too wide and bowed on the edges. Internal reflections were moderate. After temperature calibration, the set showed good linearity and a solid 23.2 fLs of brightness. On laserdiscs, this set showed considerably more video noise than the other sets.

The set has great features, including external rear speakers, solid surround sound decoding, and a two-tuner PIP. And the remote control was among the best we tried. Toshiba should also be congratulated for its onscreen remote-controlled calibration system. It gives qualified technicians an easy way to tune the picture.

The picture is big, bright and uniform. Plus, it can be calibrated easily. If we sound a little disappointed overall, it's only because we've come to expect so much from Toshiba.

continued on page 84

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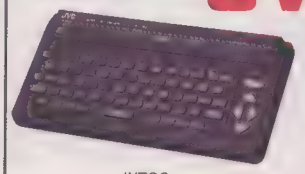

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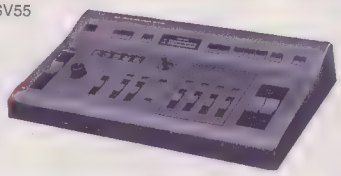

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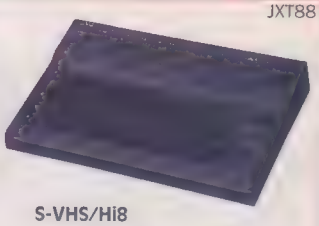

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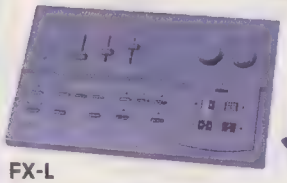

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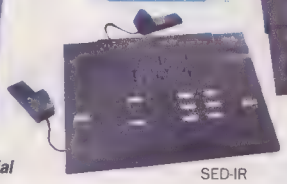

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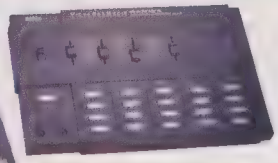

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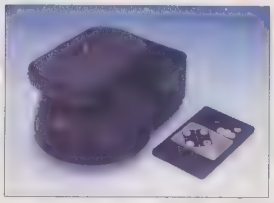

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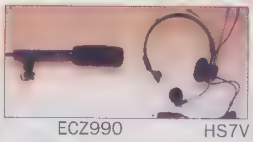

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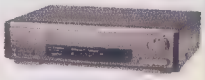

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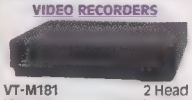

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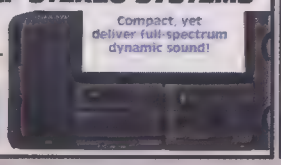

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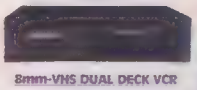

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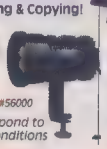

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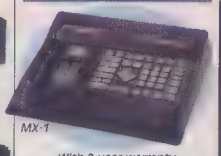

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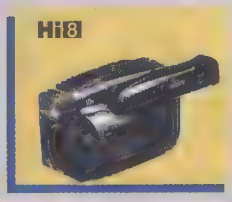

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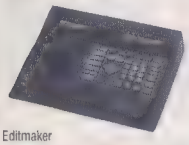

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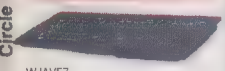

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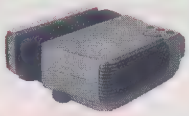

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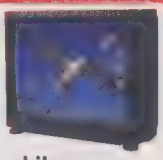

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1. What size is your primary viewing TV?
   20"-25" A☐ 25"-27" B☐ 27"-30" C☐ 35"+ D☐
2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
   0-2 E☐ 3-5 F☐ 6-10 G☐
3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
   1 hour H☐ 1 day I☐ 1 week J☐ No Planning K☐
4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
   Yes L☐ No M☐
5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
   Daily Newspaper N☐ Cable Guide O☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert P☐
   TV Guide Q☐ Other R☐
6. How many programs do you tape per week?
   1-5 S☐ 5-7 T☐ 7+ U☐
7. If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?
   Yes V☐ No W☐
8. Are you currently a subscriber to VIDEO? Yes X☐ No Y☐

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46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60
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Name _____ (please print)
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Telephone Number (with Area Code) _____

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2. Approximately how many hours per day do you watch TV?
   0-2 E☐ 3-5 F☐ 6-10 G☐
3. How far in advance do you plan your TV viewing?
   1 hour H☐ 1 day I☐ 1 week J☐ No Planning K☐
4. Do you tape "series" programming (i.e. soap operas, mini-series)?
   Yes L☐ No M☐
5. Which sources do you use to plan TV viewing?
   Daily Newspaper N☐ Cable Guide O☐ Weekly Newspaper Insert P☐
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6. How many programs do you tape per week?
   1-5 S☐ 5-7 T☐ 7+ U☐
7. If programming your VCR was made easier would you record additional shows?
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ZENITH PV5269

The set displayed a slight shift toward purple at first look. There were mild hot spots and a subtle shift from blue at the left to green at the right side of the screen. Gray scale delineation was excellent, among the best we saw. The set delivered 20 fLs and was fairly linear with the lowest out-of-the-box color temperature at 5,900 degrees.

Contrast, checked on the needle pulse, was found to be right on, backed by a solid power supply. Resolution was read at 380 lines horizontal and 500 vertical. The multiburst pattern showed a slight peak at 1 MHz and a roll-off at high frequencies, the result of a weak line amplifier. Convergence was off slightly, with the picture oversize in both directions. After calibration, this set hit the 6,500 degree mark at a low signal output and was somewhat cooler at high levels. FootLamberts measured 18 at this point, which is acceptable.

Zenith's set is one of the two most reasonably priced among the sets we tested. It comes with two remotes and two color temperature settings, warm and cool. It has Dolby surround with test tones, and a one-tuner PIP that moves anywhere onscreen. It can be set extremely well with calibration. Perhaps best of all, it is one of the first TVs, and the only one among this group, with a StarSight program guide decoder. This is a very flexible onscreen TV guide available for a small monthly fee.

The Zenith is also the only set with a simple convenience feature that we think is great in a rear-projection set: topside controls for power, channel, menus, and volume so you don't have to huddle near the floor fiddling with controls if the remote isn't handy. There is also a convenient shelf for a VCR.

Overall, you'll see a very nice picture. We'd like it even better if the graphic interface didn't obscure the image during use, and if video noise was a little lower. But at this price, for all this, we like what Zenith has accomplished. ■

TECH TIP

Think ahead

Tapes recorded on decks with flying erase heads may show glitches at your edit points. These are frequently caused by leaving an edited tape in pause too long. To avoid this, find your next shot, pause three seconds ahead of it, *then* find the in point on your edited master. Put your edit deck in pause, roll the source tape, then take your edit deck out of pause.

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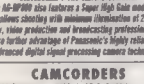

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SPEAKERS

continued from page 53

speaker gets its bass and midrange signals only from the center-channel amp. Grost says that this helps recapture natural ambience lost in the Pro-Logic process.

The center speaker uses one 6.5-inch woofer and two one-inch dome tweeters, one firing forward, the other backward. The center speaker I tried was Unity's Corian model, but I'd probably buy the wood version because it costs $510 less.

Strange as Grost's ideas may seem, they work. The unique center speaker converts the jumping-between-the-speakers effect you get with Pro-Logic into a smooth, natural front soundfield. The Unity center brings amazing clarity to Pro-Logic soundtracks, although it often emphasizes sound effects, and adds a slight upper-midrange coarseness to voices. It's as coherent a system as any that I've found. Pans from front to back and across the front speakers sound as smooth as the best THX systems.

Grost calibrates his systems by ear. I measured the system after he calibrated it and discovered that he turns the center speaker down about four decibels below the others. I preferred it set about two decibels down.

The system also excels on music. As a stereo pair, the Signature 3 ED outclassed all the other speakers, with very smooth response throughout the audio range. The Signature 3 ED offered exceptional detail, without sounding bright, as long as I kept the grilles on.

I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the speaker'sprice is $1,895/pair. I guessed that it would cost between $2,500 and $3,000 a pair. It achieved decent bass extension without a subwoofer, but a subwoofer is available for $1,000.

Unfortunately, you can't use the Signature 3 ED as a true stereo pair without disconnecting the center speaker. Even without the center speaker amp turned off, the center speaker's connections to the main speaker amps let some sound sneak into the center even in stereo bypass mode. This has a slightly detrimental effect on the sound of the Signature 3 ED for music. But even with the center speaker connected, the Signature 3 ED still sounds fantastic.

Many purists wouldn't touch so eccentric a system. I can sympathize, because any system that departs so far from the norm is tough to recommend unconditionally. But I think you'd be making a big mistake not to consider Unity Audio's system.

THE BOTTOM LINE

I recommend the Counterpoint and PSB systems without hesitation to anyone who can afford them. For budget-minded enthusiasts who like it loud, the BIC Realta may be the best speaker on the market. For those willing to try something different, the Unity Audio system offers outstanding sound at a reasonable price.

If I had to buy one of these four tomorrow for my small apartment, I'd clearly be facing a tough choice. I'd be very happy with either the Counterpoint or the PSB. The Realta sounds great, but would never sonically fit in my New York City apartment. In the end, I'd lean toward the Unity, although I would only connect the center speaker for home theater use, which is a chore some might find appallingly inconvenient.

Four years ago, *Video Magazine* experimented with using high-end music speakers for home theater, only to be frustrated in our attempts to find appropriate center and surround speakers. Today, the task is easy. With these speaker systems, I can get great music and movie sound with few compromises. For those of us who can't do without one or the other, these are high times, indeed. ■

DIRECTORY

continued from page 72

MORE HIGHLIGHTS

Barocco
1976. Gerard Depardieu, Isabelle Adjani; dir. Andre Techine. French noir–blackmail, romance, deception murder and neon lust. Mono subtitled. (NR) 102 min. VHS only, $79.95. Meridian (800-529-2300).

Clear and Present Danger
1994. Harrison Ford, Willem Defoe, James Earl Jones; Phillip Noyce. The first Tom Clancy novel to survive filming without being reduced to a clockwork cliche. The first laserdisc released in Dolby AC-3 Digital Surround. VHS in stereo. (PG-13) 141 min. VHS priced for rental. Paramount. AC-3 Surround LD $44.98. Pioneer.

La Gioconda
1990. Placido Domingo, Eva Marton, Matteo Manguerra; cond. Adam Fischer. The Vienna State Opera performs in Amiliccare Ponchielli's production of this

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CB-110 69.95 CB-E2 74.95
CB-E7 77.95 CB-E1 69.95

CHARGE COUPLERS
DC-100 24.95 BC-E1 39.95
DC-200 24.95 BC-E2 49.95
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High capacity quick-charge capable 12-volt 10-amp sintered nicad power pack. (removable) • Dual outputs for simultaneous powering two devices (eg. camera & light). Output configurations include cigarette lighter & 4-pin XLR in any combination Call

970 POWER-MAX
12 volt 14-amp
Same features as 880 Power-Pro + Belt Plus.• Includes Power-MAX belt and power chassis, 14-amp cell pack 12v 13.2 volt configuration, overnight charger, comprehensive manual. Fits waist size 29"-44". • Also available 13.2-volt 14-amp version. The 13.2-volt version offers 15-20% longer run times CALL

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TR-750 899.95 TR-2000 1399.95

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NV-CS1 394.95 NV-S20 579.95
NV-M9000 699.95 NV-R100 609.95
NV-M9000 1289.95 NV-R500 849.95
NV-R50 799.95 NVS-900 1099.95

VCR's
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HRJ-97 MS 569.95 HRJ-401 M 279.95
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AKAI
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KV-2166 539.95 KV-29CFI 1199.95
KV-2185 429.95 KV-2965 1049.95
KV-2585 671.95 KV-3400 2599.95

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VIDEO TRANSFER SYSTEM, WITH BUILT IN STEREO SOUND MIXER
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V-0372 0.6X/1.5X Zoom 39.95
V-0380 12X Telephoto 349.95
V-0385 1.5X/0.6X Lens 37mm 49.95
V-3100 1.5X/0.5X Lens 59.95
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AG-455
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Panasonic
CAMCORDER

AG-195
VHS Camcorder with Digital Special Effects, 8x Zoom lens with 2 speeds, Digital 12x or 100x zooms,Digital Speical Effects like wipe, fade, strobe and mix.

Panasonic
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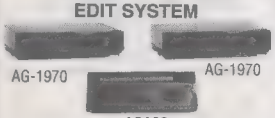
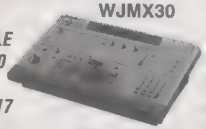


AG-1970 AG-1970
AGA96

S-VHS/VHS editing, insert and assemble edit, Hi-Fi Stereo sound. Jog shuttle search, and Multiple programmable edits

Panasonic
WJMX30



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Digital Special Effects, 108 Wipe Patterns, Wipe/Mix Section, Fade In/FadeOut, Down Stream Key, Color Correction, Audio Mixing Capability.

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Advanced Digital S-VHS Editing System. Full-Field 3D TBC. 10 Step Digital Slow Motion. DNR. Built-In Time-Code. 16x9 capable. Component Output. Heavy-Duty Tape Transport with 5 motors. 32x Picture Search. 4 channel Audio. Compact chassis.

Panasonic

AG-DP800 "SUPERCAM"
Lightest Full-Size S-VHS 3ccd Camcorder available. Built-in Time Code. 4 channel Audio. "DSP" yields 700 lines and 60db S/N. Outstanding 2 Lux sensitivity.

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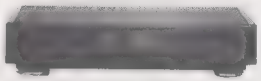
AGW1



Multi standard VCR w/built-in standard converter, plays & records PAL, NTSC, SECAM & other international formats.

JVC
BRS622U BRS822U

RMG810U

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S-VHS insert and assemble editing. 4 channel audio, optional plug in time code and TBC's,self diagnostic warning system, automatic head cleaning,on screen menu display. Recorder has built-in single event recorder.

JVC EDIT-DESK

BR-S800U BR-S500U
RM-G800U

Cost-Effective S-VHS Edit System with Time-Code. 4 channel Audio. Heavy-Duty Drive System. 32x Picture Search. Open Architecture for future expandability. Hottest System for 1994.

JVC
GYX2U

One piece camcorder 3 CCD Camera with full size S-VHS recorder built-in, very low light 3 lux, 13x or 17x optional lenses.

FutureVideo

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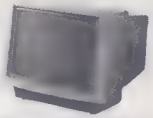
SONY.



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13" Trinitron High Resolution Computer Monitor. Composite, S-Video and RGB inputs. Built-in Audio Speaker. Works well with Toaster System.

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Advanced CCD technology, separate Y/C signal processing, high quality sound, quick-start recording, camera gen-lock capability, variable speed electronic shutter, Clear Scan™, edit search, built-in color bar generator.

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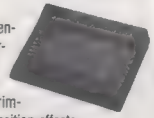
MX-1

4 Input Video with 2 channel TBC. Over 200 transitions with Chroma Key. Picture-In-Picture effect. Easy-to-Use. Professional Quality at Budget Price.

VIDEONICS



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Battery belts available in 12Volts or 30Volts with 6, 12 or 20 power. Both cigarette lighter or 4 pin XLR output available. Please specify when ordering.

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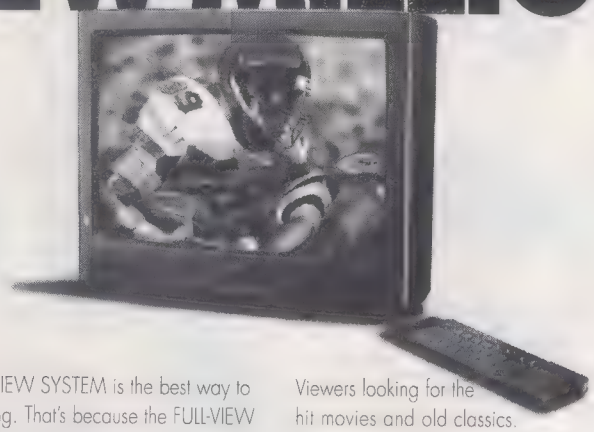

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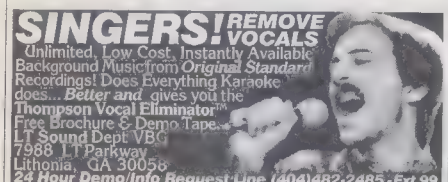

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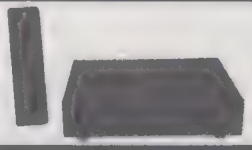

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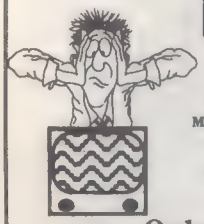

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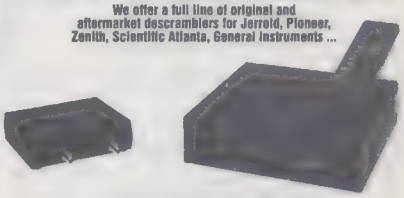

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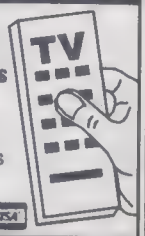

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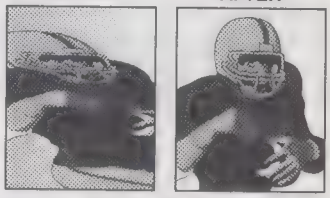

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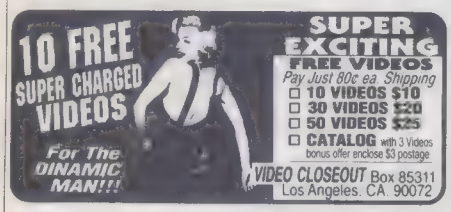

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Naked in New York
1994. Eric Stoltz, Mary-Louise Parker, Jill Clay burgh, Tony Curtis, Kathleen Turner, Timothy Dalton, Whoopi Goldberg; dir. Dan Algrant. Sometimes life just gets too complicated for romance: Playwrite pressured by first play being produced starts to lose long-term lover to demands of careers, families, and time apart. Surround. (R) 89 mins. VHS priced for rental. LD $34.95. Columbia TriStar.

The Prince of Tides
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1991. Barbra Streisand, Nick Nolte; dir. Streisand. For those who like their Nolte smooth not crunchy. Edition includes a Streisand-approved widescreen print, audio commentary by Streisand, audition and rehearsal video, alternate and deleted versions of scenes, and outtakes of Babs singing "Places That Belong to You." .Stereo. (R) 132 min. LD $99.95. Criterion.

The Razor's Edge
1946. B&W. Tyrone Power, Gene Tierney, Anne Baxter; dir. Edmund Goulding. An American in Paris loses spouse and child and turns to alcohol, meaningless sex and misadventures. The original film version, based on Somerset Maugham's novel, which taps the fantasies of many. Mono. (NR) 146 min. VHS priced for rental. FoxVideo.

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A Woman at Her Window
1977. Romy Schneider, Philllipe Noiret, Victor Lanoux; dir. Pierre Granier-Deferre. Aristocrat amuses herself with nobleman, but has heart overturned by revolutionary in pre-World War II Greece. Mono subtitled. (NR) 118 min. VHS only, $79.95. Connoisseur (800-529-2300). ■

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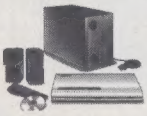

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OFF THE AIR

BY MICHELLE WEST

A viewable feast— 15 films in 26 hours

"Don't forget to get *Jackson County Jail*," says Barb.

"I won't."

"I'm dying to see what Tommy Lee Jones' buns looked like when he was younger."

"I won't forget," I promise. "Anything else? Last chance."

"The popcorn and the banana bread will be ready by the time you get back," says Paul.

And so six people, two singles and two couples, who have just arisen from a long night's sleep, prepare for a grueling, 26-hour movie marathon, while I run off to the video store to round up the tapes.

•

How many nights have you spent in a dingy theater, watching movie after movie? The answer is probably lots if you're a real movie buff. But theater marathons have all kinds of problems: Limited snack selection, long lines between flicks, hard seats and a limited selection of movies. After all, you pretty much have to take what the theaters offer.

Enter video. Seven or eight times a year, when most of us can arrange days off from work at the same time, several friends and myself stage our own movie marathons, but with videos. We start around noon and run until early afternoon the next day, when whoever is still standing takes the movies back. It's a terrific way to indulge our passion for great movies and good company.

At first, we all gathered together in a single apartment. But we've found our marathons work better if each person or couple watches in his, her or their own place. (It helps that we all live in the same apartment complex.) We start a marathon by collecting lists of desired movies. Then we rent 'em—15 or more in a single shot, and pass them around. A couple of marathoners make fabulous snacks we all share. Our rules are few and easygoing, but important. If someone falls asleep by accident, someone else knocking on the door to trade movies will rouse the groggy cineaste. If someone wants to take a snooze, that's fine. If someone decides to drop out, that's also fine. He just passes his videos to someone else in the group and tapes a do-not-disturb sign to his door.

Our marathons are as good as they are because we all get to see most of the movies we want to see. We share the costs of renting and of the snacks. We try to get together in the days following a marathon to talk about the movies we rented, most of which most of us saw. It sure beats spending all night in a theater, then trying to find your way home.

•

When I return and lay my booty on the table, eager hands grab at the videos. "I don't see *Wayne's World 2*," says John, disappointed.

"They were out, sorry."

"First dibs on *Carlito's Way*."

Everyone takes two or three cassettes and half a loaf of banana bread, and bids adieu. I settle in with *My Life*. I always try to start with the movies I most want to see, because sometimes the ones I see toward the end are a little...er...fuzzy.

I'm still sobbing over *What's Love Got To Do With It?* when the first knock hits my door. It's Barb, who lives upstairs. We swap, and I get *Carlito's Way* and *The Waterdance*. I can't believe it—Helen Hunt naked? Hours later I fit in some stretching and breathing exercises when I shuttle this double feature up the stairs to Len and John, who reward me with two new videos and a dozen crab puffs with asparagus and fresh basil.

Before too long, a disaster hits—I doze off during *Hero*, even though I adore Andy Garcia. The rest of the night is going to be tough. I can tell. The wee hours of the morning are approaching, and I'm hitting the wall. But I know I can fight my way through. I know I can handle it. After all, we don't call it a marathon for nothing. I carb load some spaghetti and guzzle half a bottle of Gatorade.

Still later, I ferry a pair of tapes up the elevator to Paul and Jean. They beg for a few more minutes. It seems that one of their films has gotten them hot and they're kinda, well, occupied. (This is another reason we found it better to migrate to our own apartments during marathons.) Hey, which movie was that?

When Barb brings down *Jackson County Jail* and *Malice*, both of which I've already screened during this long, long night, I decide to take a nap. Paul wakes me four hours later with a swap, and I find I've gotten my second wind. I feel restored. I'm ready for the big finish.

When it's over, I've seen 9.5 movies, a personal best. Only John has made it through 13, which means no sleep at all. But like any true marathoners, our goal is not to win, but to finish. And I have survived, and enjoyed, another. ■

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